GURU RAMANA

MEMORIES AND NOTES

By

S. S. COHEN

"The whole universe is but a tiny ripple on the infinite ocean of *Sat-chit-ananda* Ramana. I meditate on Him, the Sublime Indweller of the Heart-cavity, transcending all thought."

(*Sri Ramana Gita*)

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To

BHAGAVAN

The Dispeller of Ignorance

Publisher's Note

We are happy to bring out the 8th edition of this valuable and moving book on Sri Bhagavan written by S. S. Cohen. He was a staunch devotee who was privileged to move with the Master, was able to observe him at close quarters, experience his grace, study his teachings in the proper light and also record them all.

In this edition of *Guru Ramana*, we have included his small booklet *Residual Reminiscences*, recollections that are no less inspiring, hitherto published separately.

We hope spiritual aspirants will find this work both absorbing and useful in their quest.

Sri Ramanasramam | **V. S. Ramanan**
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PREFACE

This book, as its sub-title indicates, contains some of my reminiscences as well as the notes which I took down at odd times during my long residence in Ramanashram.

The memories of a close association with its celebrated Master Sri Ramana Maharshi, lasting for more than fourteen years, are vast, indeed, but the majority, being of spiritual nature, must needs remain unexpressed.

Part I contains these reminiscences – my first impressions of the Master, his spiritual influence on his disciples, the conditions prevailing then in the Ashram, some autobiographical reflections and episodes, etc.

Part II consists of extracts from my notebooks, where from time to time I jotted down the English translation of the Master's answers to questions almost as soon as they were given. They cover practically all the questions which a beginner on this path asks himself and which were actually put to him by me or in my presence.

Part III is the diary which I kept of the last two years of the Master's life. It describes, in particular, the closing scenes of his earthly career as an illustrious member of that divine race of Rishis, who for thousands of years have sanctified this land by their presence and by their sublime teaching of the Absolute. Seekers of whatever cast or creed, race or colour, have found in him their ideal of a perfect Master. With the crystal clear reason of Gaudapada and Shankara, and the peaceful, unwavering devotion (*Parabhakti*) to the supreme Quest, peculiar to the Vedantic Teachers and the path of *Jnana,* he satisfies both head and heart. Above all, the purity and love which radiate from him ceaselessly shed their beatific

influence on all around him, justifying the appellation of "Bhagavan" given to him by his very early devotees when he was still in his teens, in consideration of his rigorous *tapas* and the original knowledge of the Absolute which he exhibited at that tender age.

Vellore S. S. C.

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PART 1

RETROSPECT

I

ARRIVAL

The third of February 1936, early morning, saw my horse-cart rolling on the uneven two-and-a-half-mile road from Tiruvannamalai railway station to Ramanashram. Two sleepless nights in the train from Bombay found me tired in body and mind. My head was swimming and my senses were confused. I had hoped for some rest in the Ashram, but when I arrived there at last, there was not a soul to be seen anywhere. Presently, a corpulent man with a giant rugged head and scarlet-red lips from perpetual chewing of betel-nuts appeared. He was, I later discovered, "the legal adviser" of the Ashram, who sometimes acted as the *de facto sarvadhikari* (manager) as well. "Is that Mr. Cohen? Follow me quickly before the Maharshi goes out for his walk," he called out. I obeyed, extremely eager to see the great Sage, who had haunted me night and day for three long months. I was led to a small dining room, at the door of which I was asked to remove my shoes. As I was trying to unlace them, my eyes fell on a pleasant-looking middle-aged man inside the room, wearing nothing but a *kaupin*, with eyes as cool as moonbeams, sitting on the floor before a leaf-plate nearly emptied, and beckoning me with the gentlest of nods and the sweetest smile imaginable.

He was the Maharshi himself. My mind, which was already in a state of haze, grew now more confused in my haste to enter. But the shoe lace resisted. So I tugged at and broke it. Just then my guide appeared again and said: "If you have any

fruits to offer, bring them now." "They are in my suit case," I replied, and plunged my hands into my pockets for the keys. But the keys had gone: I had dropped them in the train or at the station, I did not know where, in my hurry to race to the Ashram. I told this to the legal adviser and immediately forgot all about them and entered the room.

It was then the Ashram's custom to honour the newcomer by giving him his first meal in a line directly opposite the Maharshi's seat and at hardly four feet distance from it. My leaf-plate was thus placed there with two rice cakes on it. I took no notice of the cakes, although my hand fingered them, but directed my whole look at the peaceful countenance of Sri Bhagavan. He had by then finished eating and was slowly rolling a betel-leaf for a chew, as if deliberately to give me a little more of his company, when a man entered from the back door, which was the passage to the small kitchen, and, in a low voice, said something in Tamil to him, from which I understood the single word "keys." Then Maharshi rose, looked at me by way of farewell, and left the room. I hastily swallowed half a cake, gulped the cup of tea, and went out in search of the room to which my luggage had been taken. But alas, I could not have a bath or a change of clothes – everything was locked up in the suit cases. I was greatly embarrassed, and started thinking of breaking them open, when someone announced that Sri Maharshi was coming to the *Darshan* Hall. I stopped thinking and rushed straight to the Hall with my hat and full suit on. Behind me calmly walked in the tall, impressive figure of the Maharshi with leisurely though firm steps.

I was alone in the Hall with him. Joy and peace suffused my being – never before, had I such a delightful feeling of

purity and well-being at the mere proximity of a man. My mind was already in deep contemplation of him – him not as flesh, although that was exquisitely formed and featured, but as an unsubstantial principle which could make itself so profoundly felt despite the handicap of a heavy material vehicle. When after a while I became aware of my environment, I saw him looking at me with large penetrating eyes, wreathed in smiles rendered divinely soothing by their child-like innocence. All of a sudden I felt something fall in my lap and heard the jingling of keys – my keys! I looked up at the Maharshi extremely puzzled. The man – Sri Ramaswami Pillai – who had dropped them through the door behind me came in and explained that he had gone to the railway station on a bicycle and found the station master waiting for him. It appears that during the few minutes that the train had stopped at the station a passenger had providentially entered the very compartment I had vacated, and, seeing the keys on the seat, he picked them up, and, wonder of wonders! ran up to the station master and handed them over to him. The latter by an unusual flash of intuition surmised that the keys belonged to an Ashram visitor, whom he might have seen detrain in the morning, and awaited a claim for them.

It was a series of miracles which occurred on my behalf in the short space of barely ninety minutes, of which I was blissfully ignorant, absorbed as I was in the entrancing personality of this magnificent human magnet – Sri Ramana Bhagavan.

It is needless to say that from that day Ramanashram became my permanent home.

II

EXPECTATION

Days melted into weeks, and weeks into months and the foreigner impatiently awaited the Great Experience: each day was *the* day, and each moment *the* moment. The Indian is never in a hurry: he knows his work well, and, looking wistfully ahead, continues his practice, full of unshakeable confidence. But the foreigner, being used to work on a timetable, fixes hour and date, as if for an interview. As the clock strikes, he buckles on his belt, sits stiff, shuts his eyes, and waits for the interview. The clock strikes again, he opens his eyes, unbelts himself, and rises, postponing his hope to the evening or the next morning, and so on and on he goes.

When many months thus rolled by and nothing startling happened, he cried with all the fervour of his soul: "How long, O Lord, how long?" But lo! what had happened to him! He looked back at his old self and looked at the present one – what a change, Good God! And he wondered what could have happened in six short months. Then the Great Secret dawned on him – the secret influence of the Divine Man in whose radiant ocean he had been daily bathing: the interview, after all, did take place, although the foreigner was not aware of it.

III

VANAPRASTHA – FOREST OR ASHRAM LIFE

Thus began the pilgrim's *Vanaprastha;* its spirit slowly crept into his hungry soul. For the body the new life was hard, the change very drastic. A redeeming feature was that in Ramanashram, unlike in other Ashrams, there were no compulsions of any kind; no programme to be followed, no meetings, study-classes or *bhajan* to be attended, so that the body was spared the additional strain of having to rise at an early hour every morning, or be in a certain place at a certain inconvenient time, and so on. Bhagavan was the most liberal of Gurus in that at no time did he consider the need to frame rules and regulations to control the lives of his disciples; nor did he believe in a common, enforced discipline, for he himself had attained the highest without them, and had discovered the self-evident truth, illustrated by his own experience, that at the right time Realisation surges up from within by a free impulse, like the budding and blossoming of a flower.

While it is true that not all seekers are as ripe as Bhagavan was, when the flood of Realisation suddenly inundated him in his seventeenth year and, thus, need a discipline to transform the desultory life of the world, to which they are accustomed, into that of self-controlled yogis, yet the discipline that is imposed from without can neither bear the desired fruits nor endure. The discipline which is not known

to fail is the one which is self-imposed, constitutionally determined, and readily applied by an inner urge of the awakened intellect. Hence Bhagavan left his disciples completely free to mould their lives as best they could. This physical freedom considerably helped me to tide over the first few difficult months of my new existence.

The whole month of February 1936 I lived in the Ashram in a completely bare room with a sand-covered floor and palm leaves for walls and roof. In March I started constructing a small hut for my residence in the neighbourhood of the Ashram, as the next chapter will relate. No sooner was it ready than I moved to it. I hardly stayed in it in the daytime: my mind was wholly fixed on the Master. So I spent my days and a part of my nights in the Hall, where he lived and slept.

There I quietly sat and listened to the visitors' talks with him and to his answers, which were sometimes translated into English, particularly if the questioner was a foreigner or a north Indian – not always. His answers were fresh and sweet. His influence was all pervasive in his silence not less than in his speech. To me in the beginning this was all the more perceptible in the contrast it offered to the hustle and bustle of the life on which I had just turned my back – to the wasted energy, the false values, the foolish expectations from ideals which are in themselves hollow reeds, the dreary intercourse with people with whom one has very little in common; to the social rules which have been laid down by many generations of selfishness, convention and superstitions, not to speak of the mess of politics, of rank and wealth, and the bitter jealousy and hatred they breed in the minds of men. It is small wonder therefore that Bhagavan appears to the serious-minded as a beacon light in an otherwise impenetrable darkness, and a haven of peace.

Bhagavan was then enjoying the sound, robust health of middle age, and could very well afford to be available at almost all hours of the day to devotees. The years 1936-1938 were very blissful, indeed, to us, when we could gather round his couch and speak to him as intimately as to a beloved father; tell him all our troubles and show him our letters without let or hindrance. After 8 p.m. when the hall contained only the local residents, we sat round him for a 'family chat' till about 10 o'clock. Then he related to us stories from the Puranas or the lives of Saints, yielding to transportations of emotions when he depicted scenes of great *bhakti*, or great human tragedies, to which he was sensitive to the extreme. Then he shed tears which he vainly attempted to conceal. Some stories are memorable like the following one. Kabir was a great *bhakta* (devotee) and lived in or near Benares some centuries ago. Although he had *siddhis* (psychic powers), he earned his livelihood by weaving. One day, when he was working on his looms, a disciple entered in great excitement and said: "Sir, there is a juggler outside here who is attracting large crowds by making his stick stand in the air", etc. Thereupon Kabir, who like all true saints, discouraged the display of jugglery, wanting to shame the man, rushed out with a big ball of thread in hand. Seeing the long bamboo standing in the air, he threw up the ball of thread, which went up and up unwinding till the whole thread stood stiff in mid-air, and to a far greater height than the juggler's stick, without any support whatever. The people, including the juggler himself, were stunned in amazement, and Sri Bhagavan's eyes acted the amazement, while his hand stood high above his head in the position of that of Kabir when he threw up the ball.

On another occasion Bhagavan recited from memory a poem of a Vaishnava Saint, in which occurred the words "Fold

me in thy embrace, O Lord," when the arms of Bhagavan joined in a circle round the vacant air before him, and his eyes shone with devotional ardour, while his voice shook with stifled sobs which did not escape our notice. It was fascinating to see him acting the parts he related, and be in such exhilarated moods as these.

Some disciples and his attendants used to sleep on the floor of the hall at night. Bhagavan's sleep was very light: he woke every now and then, and almost always he found an attendant nearby fully awake to say a few words to, and slept again. Once or twice he would go out for a few minutes, and, by 5 a.m., when the Veda chanters came from the township, they found him fully awake and chatting in a soft, subdued voice. Now the *parayanam* would get started and go on for a little less than an hour, during which everybody abstained from talking, and Bhagavan often sat cross-legged and completely indrawn. Then he went out for bath, breakfast, and a little stroll on the hill, and returned at about 7.30, when visitors and devotees began trickling in – men, women and children – till they filled the hall by about 9 a.m. This morning hour of the *parayanam* was the best time of the day for meditation: the congregation was small, women and children were absent, the weather cool, and the mind had not yet completely emerged to run its usual riot. Over and above this Bhagavan then shone in the stillness of his *samadhi*, which permeated the hall and the meditation of the disciples. But unfortunately I could not keep up this attendance, nor could I benefit by it even when present, for my mind remained in the fog of somnolence. Being a life-long bad sleeper I never succeeded in making the requisite six-hour sleep before six in the morning. Another tendency which I could not completely overcome was intolerance to noise, of

which the hall was seldom free. Apart from the free access to it by all and sundry there was also the freedom of singing, which at times took one by surprise at a moment when the hall was plunged in silence and the atmosphere conducive to meditation. All of a sudden a soprano voice rose from somewhere in the hall intoning some hymn or other, or reciting some *shloka* in a South-Indian language, to be succeeded by a tenor or another soprano, often the latter, in competition with a male of the species, till Bhagavan went out at his usual hours. These were: 9.45 for a few minutes, 11 o'clock for luncheon, followed by the midday stroll in Palakottu, evening 4-45 on the hill, preceding the evening Veda *parayanam*, and 7 o'clock for dinner. The best I could do then was to remain in a semi-contemplative or reflective mood, reserving my serious meditation to the quiet solitude of my own room. Major Chadwick, the only other foreign resident then, who had preceded me to Ramanashram by exactly three months, used to wonder how I could meditate in my room at all. I reciprocated by myself wondering how he could seriously concentrate amidst so much disturbance in the hall. Even in as small a matter as this, it will be observed, individual idiosyncrasies are apparent. These lonely hours I snatched from the time when Bhagavan was out.

Every second morning I went all alone for *pradakshina* – an eight mile non-stop trek round Arunachala hill – which took me almost exactly three hours to accomplish. This had its own special benefit. At that early hour I generally was in a walking-meditation mood, particularly as I expressly made a habit of it. The benefit of regularity in the practice of *sadhana* is here fully borne out. Another factor to a successful *pradakshina* and, to me, the greatest, was the determination

at the very start not to retrospect – not to look back upon the past – throughout the three-hour trek. I might look this side or that, but would never allow memory to ruin my calmness. Each time I caught memory sneaking in, I immediately brought my attention to the rhythm of my footfalls till the mind regained its restful state. The partial fatigue experienced in the latter half of the journey automatically induced this mental rest without much effort. Somehow this practice worked marvellously well with me.

Speaking of retrospection, *sadhakas* must be warned against the tricks of memory, of which nothing is more harmful, nothing more destructive to the peace of mind which is necessary for a successful *sadhana*. It cannot be too often recommended to them to forbear looking into the past with its trials and errors, acts of omission and commission, regrets, fear, passion, love and hatred, personal tragedies, etc. Everything is dust, everything transitory, including the seemingly indissoluble human ties, more so wealth and fame, and, thus, not worth a moment's regret. Nothing is changeless and lasting but the natural state of the pure being.

Another disturbance in the hall was caused by the distribution of the offerings on the spot, be they mangoes, raisins, sugar-candy, dates, or merely puffed rice. The moment one came, it went immediately round, after having been first touched and tasted by Bhagavan, so that he who happened to be then plunged in meditation for an hour or so, on opening the eyes sometimes found bits of edibles near his feet or in his lap, awaiting his pleasure. This custom was wisely stopped in 1938, when all the offerings were collected and distributed in the dining hall at meal times, or among guests who could not eat the usual food.

The constant influx of visitors was of some help in that it afforded the much-needed relaxation to an otherwise tense

life. Secondly the peculiar problems which visitors brought with them were a useful study – study of the human mind and the endless ills to which it is subject. The problems of the mind and the conditions which give rise to them are infinitely more numerous than the variety which the physical universe presents to the human senses. Moreover, watching the masterly ways Bhagavan tackled these problems was *sadhana* in itself. Rationality was the very essence of his arguments. Whilst the ultimate answer to all the questions was always the same, namely, "Find out who you are," he first met every questioner on his own ground, and then slowly steered him round to the source of all problems – the Self – the realisation of which he held to be the universal panacea. Psychologists deal only with the working of the mind, but Bhagavan goes to the source, the mind or Self itself. It was a wonder that all visitors were agreeably impressed by him, sometimes even without comprehending the drift of his ideas. People take *siddhis* as the sure sign of Perfection, but few understand the subtle influence of the truly Perfect person, who, without the deliberate use of miracles, works out the transformation of the people who come into contact with him, more so the genuine disciples, whom he actually turns into *muktas*, or well on the way to *mukti*, of which external *siddhis* are totally incapable. Many of those who have had the inestimable privilege of a long stay with Bhagavan bear witness to the blessedness which his mere presence conferred on them. This is the highest and truest *siddhi* which always accompanies *Jnana* (knowledge of the Self or Supreme Perfection).

When the audience shrank, the Master at times became humorously autobiographical about his early school and home life, or about his many experiences on the hill with sadhus,

devotees, etc. One of the stories was about a "miracle" he had once performed in Skandashram, when his mother one day, leaving him inside a room in deep *samadhi*, bolted him in from outside and went to the town, and, on her return, to her great surprise, found him seated under a tree in the garden outside, and the door still bolted, as she had left it. She was so impressed by this "miracle" that she told it to everyone she met. The truth was, Bhagavan said, that he had unbolted the two door-shutters from inside and then re-bolted them, as before, from outside, from sheer habit.

Again and again the Master spoke of his early life in the big Arunachaleshwara temple in the first year of his escape to Tiruvannamalai (1896). Whilst urchins troubled him, educated adults had much respect for him, although he was then still in his teens. Pious men used to seek his company almost daily on the steps of Subramanya's shrine. Two lawyers, in particular, were assiduous in this respect. On a certain Hindu festival day they prepared a grand dinner and came to take him to it, but his immovable silence indicated his refusal of their invitation. There was no alternative for them but to use force, which they did by joining hands and bodily lifting him, till he agreed to walk with them. Bhagavan said that that was the only house in Tiruvannamalai where he ate once. Another time he was also bodily carried and bundled into a waiting cart and fed, but that was not in a private house but in Ishanya Mutt – an Ashram-like institution for *sannyasis* of a special caste in the northern end of the town.

Then there came a break in my life at Tiruvannamalai. By the end of 1938 I felt I must go away for a while, as the next chapter will narrate: not to part company with my *sadhana*, but, on the contrary, to prevent it from degenerating into a colourless, monotonous routine, which I feared might

wreck, or dry up the perennial inspirations which are necessary for continued efforts. So I planned a leisurely tour in South India. I visited temples and stayed in holy places for long or short durations, as the spiritual moods took me. Everywhere I was well received. No temple closed its doors in my face anywhere, as it was done to non-Hindus. Wherever I went Bhagavan's name acted like a charm, particularly as I had adopted the Indian dress from the beginning (1936), lived in Brahmin streets, and ate Brahmin food, which was pure vegetarian. I even for the time discarded the wearing of footwear, bathed in Hindu bathing-tanks, and attended evening temple worship with the smearing of ashes on my arms and forehead. This proved of much benefit at that stage of my *sadhana*. In the end of 1939 I found myself landed in Anandashram in Kanhangad, on the north Kerala coast, of which Swami Ramdas was the presiding deity. I had planned to stay there for a few weeks, but somehow I lingered for more than eight months.

Anandashram is very beautifully situated. To the east stretches a small range of sloping hillocks, almost evergreen from the torrential rains that fall there in both the monsoon seasons. To the west a plain gently slopes for almost four miles down to the sea, across fields sparsely strewn with villagers' huts, coconut groves, and tobacco plantations, in between which is wedged a thin strip of the township, which is very much smaller than Tiruvannamalai. Being far from the public road the Ashram enjoys a natural, quiet and sweet, idyllic simplicity, which made it a congenial retreat at that time for me. So, I liked the place and stayed on, and did my work in my own way. Even the peculiar atmosphere of this Ashram suited me in my then moods. After a short while I began to distinguish the psychical difference between it and

Ramanashram, I was greatly amused when I detected the way Ramdas was affecting me. It enhanced the boyish tendencies which had been at times causing me much inconvenience, and which I had been trying to curb – the loquacity, the hastiness in action, the quickness of temper, the extreme sensitiveness to sound, the bouts of paralysing shyness, etc. I had spent fifteen years (since 1925) in comparative loneliness and silence, but Anandashram drew me out to the spontaneity of my adolescence for a good part of the time I was there.

For in Ramdas's presence the heart expanded with joy, reminiscent of Krishna's *leela* in Brindavan. Joy permeated everything: the hills, the grazing cattle, the faces round one, and the very air one breathed – all were joy-inspiring, all Ramdas's RAM. In the spiritual life of some devotees what counts most is genuine *bhakti*, irrespective of labels and nomenclature, and Anandashram was, no doubt, surcharged with it, but it was a *bhakti* which was nurtured by joy. Joy and love oozed out of every pore of Ramdas's being and infected his neighbourhood.

When I returned to my ashram in July 1940, the Second World War had already broken out, and darkness had fallen on the hearts and minds of men. Bombs had dropped on Warsaw like rain. Poland and Czechoslovakia had been subdued. Many millions of innocent men, women, and children, had been driven to concentration camps for a dread purpose. The Maginot Line had cracked and crumbled, and Paris had fallen to the mighty army of the invader.

I had expected to see some marks of this widespread devastation on the life of Ramanashram, but on arrival I found none whatever, except, to my surprise, a doubled rate of flow of devotees. The only other physical change I observed was in the Master's body, which started showing signs of age, which

had compelled the management to curtail the attendance hours at night. At midday the doors of the hall were closed for two hours for his siesta – the first time in the history of the Ashram. At first Bhagavan demurred but soon he grew resigned to the situation, seeing that it had some justification.

The stream of visitors continued to increase, so that soon afterwards sitting accommodation and easy access to the Master on personal matters became difficult. In fact under the new rules, letters and articles written by devotees were made first to pass the censorship of the office before they could be shown to him, which was not without reasons. One or two devotees, taking advantage of the Master's compassionate nature, took to write to him letters running to several pages in very small hand on petty, often imaginary, difficulties in their spiritual practice, on which he strained his eyes for one or two hours. He was too scrupulous to let a single word go unread, which encouraged them to write still longer letters and daily too, imagining their epistles to be of great interest to Bhagavan till the management found it imperative to clamp down a ban on all correspondence to be shown or written to him.

A year or two later a colony of devotees, with families for the most parts, sprang up round the Ashram. As Bhagavan's body grew weaker, his power to influence and attract increased, so that the tide of settlers and visitors continued steadily to rise and included world-famed philosophers, scholars, politicians, ministers, provincial governors, generals, foreign diplomats, members of foreign missions. They all came, whether in war or peace, in rain or shine. The tide swelled and swelled and reached its zenith in 1950, the last year of his earthly life. Till the last the Master continued to instruct. In the whole history of the Ashram there has never been a bar to the seeking of

spiritual guidance orally from him, except in the very last year when he was seriously laid up and the visitors of their own accord desisted from troubling him.

As time passed and the Master's state of mind and ideas took firm root in me, I ceased to ask questions, or to intercept him in his walks outside the Ashram grounds, as I used to do in the first six months of what I call my *Vanaprastha* life; for by then all my spiritual questions – call them problems, if you like – had resolved themselves in various ways. The final conclusion to which I came in the end of these six months I reported it one day to Bhagavan. He showed his gracious approval by a gesture of finality with his hand and said: "So much lies in your power, the rest must be left entirely to the Guru, who is the ocean of Grace and Mercy seated in the heart, as the seeker's own Self."

IV

YATRA – PILGRIMAGE

> "I thought of Thee and was caught in Thy Grace;
> And like a spider in Thy web didst Thou Keep
> me captive to swallow me in Thine own hour."
> (*Aksharamanamala* of Sri Maharshi)

The builders had put the finishing touches to my small mud hut in Palakottu garden on April 4, 1936, and although its walls and lime plaster were still wet, I decided to enter it the very next day.

Palakottu is a large garden of about ten acres in area granted by the Government over eighty years ago to a Vira-Shaiva community for the purpose of growing flowers in it for the big Arunachaleswara temple in the township of Tiruvannamalai. It lies on the Western boundaries of Ramanashram, and has a clean and well-preserved deep tank seasonally fed by the rain water, which falls down the slopes of the sacred Arunachala hill, apart from two or three natural springs in its bottom. Around the huge, century-old trees of this garden, devotees of Sri Ramana Bhagavan since many years had built their small *kutirs*, where at different times lived Paul Brunton, Yogi Ramiah, Sri B.V. Narasimhaswami, the author of "Self-realisation," Sri Muruganar Swami, the Tamil poet who filled a bulky tome of songs in praise of Sri Bhagavan, and many others, and where some *sadhakas* still live. In Palakottu, then the only inhabited place within a mile radius from the Ashram, I chose for my hut a lonely site to

the north-west of the tank, edging the shady foot-path over which Sri Bhagavan used to take his midday walk, so that during its construction he could see the daily progress of the work and sometimes exchange a few words with the masons, till the 4th of April, when I informed him of my intention to start living immediately in it.

Sri Bhagavan had known of my chronic asthma, and probably thought it foolhardy on my part to live in a place which would take two to three months to dry up. I noticed his hesitation in uttering his usual "yes"; but, being hard-pressed for accommodation, and very reluctant to leave him even for a day, I completed my arrangements for the warming ceremony, known here as *griha-pravesham*, to take place the next day.

On the fifth of April the invited devotees gathered in my hut, and about noon the Master himself strolled in, on his way back from his usual walk, and, refusing the special chair I had made ready for him, he squatted like the others on the mat-covered floor. After the ceremony Bhagavan left. I followed him from a distance, waited till the devotees cleared away and approached him. "Bhagavan," I started, "you have given a home for my body, I now need your Grace to grant the eternal home for my soul, for which I broke all my human ties and came." He stopped in the shade of a tree, gazed silently on the calm water of the tank for a few seconds and replied: "Your firm conviction brought you here; where is the room for doubt?" Where is the room for doubt indeed! I reflected.

Three years rolled by, and the Master continued to pass daily by my hut. In the beginning he used to take shelter from the midday sun on my verandah for two or three minutes, during which I made myself scarce, in order not to inconvenience him, till one day I foolishly placed a chair for

his use on the sly, which made him once for all boycott my verandah. Despite his full knowledge of our adoration of him, he was extremely sensitive to the slightest trouble which might ensue from him to us, or, for the matter of that, to anyone: thus placing a special chair for him, or expecting him every day at a fixed hour, he interpreted as interfering with my rest – hence the boycott.

Three years, I said, had passed since that *griha-pravesham* day, years of great soul-searching, of incessant attempts to penetrate the Master's mind, of reflection, study, meditation, and what not; years of extreme efforts to adjust myself to the entirely new conditions of life, of physical and psychical strain. They were admittedly intense years, in fact so intense, that I then felt that I must quit immediately, and informed the Master accordingly.

"Bhagavan," I said on a day then near my hut, "I feel a strong urge to go on a *yatra* (pilgrimage) to the South – Chidambaram, Srirangam, Rameshwaram ...," but lo! a look on Bhagavan's face struck me forcibly with the thought "*Yatra*! what for? Are you still in doubt?" I instantly remembered his words of long ago: "Where is the room for doubt?" and, as if in reply to a verbal question from him, I continued: "No, Bhagavan, now I feel that I need a change for some months, which I intend spending in Hindu holy places." He smiled approval and enquired about the date and time of my starting, and whether I had made arrangements for my stay in the various places I was to visit. Extremely touched by his solicitude, I answered that I was going as a *sadhu*, trusting to chance for accommodation.

For three months thereafter I lay on a mat in Cape Comorin, immensely relieved of the mental tension which the Master's physical form had caused me. In solitude I

plunged in reflections on his blissful silence and calm repose. The stillness of his mind haunted me everywhere I went – in the beautiful, gem-like temple of the youthful Virgin Goddess, on the shores of the vast blue ocean around me and the sand dunes, in the fishing villages and the endless stretches of coconut groves, which ran along the seashore and the interior of the Cape. I felt his influence in the depths of my soul and cried: "O Bhagavan, how mighty you are and how sublime and all-pervasive is the immaculate purity of your mind! With what tender emotions do we, your disciples, think of your incomparable qualities, your gentleness; your serene, adorable countenance; your cool, refreshing smiles; the sweetness of the words that come out of your mouth; the radiance of your all-embracing love; your equal vision towards one and all, even towards diseased stray animals!"

V

MASTER'S INFLUENCE

The influence of Sri Maharshi on genuine seekers, who leave the world behind and turn pilgrims on the path of the Absolute, is great indeed; for such aspirants touch a sympathetic chord in his soul, evoking spiritual responses of great magnitude.

A close friend of mine once related to me his experience when a brief talk with the Master made him stop his fruitless pursuit of the "occult" and take to the path of knowledge (*Jnana*), which Bhagavan propounds and which has proved of immense benefit to those who had followed it. I let him use his own words:–

"On one of those happy days of July .... I decided at last to acquaint the Maharshi with the disturbed state of my mind, after a number of months' stay in the Ashram, during which I had listened, reflected and argued with myself. Having been a keen student of Theosophy for twelve years, I had imbibed notions and theories which conflicted in almost every important respect with the Maharshi's teaching. Theosophy and Vedanta, I discovered, notwithstanding the claim of Theosophy to the contrary, run along parallels which never meet. "Occult" Theosophy speaks of spheres and planes, of journeys into planets, of invisible Masters, hierarchies, Adepts, rays, supersensuous initiations and meetings, and hardly, if at all, of the Reality, with which the Vedanta and Maharshi exclusively deal, namely, the one Self, one Life, one Existence.

In fact seekers are again and again reminded that occult powers are diametrically opposed to the truth they seek.

"I was finally convinced that the Maharshi spoke from direct, valid experience, and on that day I made up my mind to speak alone with him, before the hall filled with devotees.

"It was eight in the morning. Sri Bhagavan had just entered and had hardly settled in his usual place, when I drew near his sofa and squatted on the bare floor. The attendant alone was present, keeping alive the incense fire and fixing new incense sticks in their silver stand, but he did not understand English. Nothing I knew gave greater pleasure to the Maharshi than to listen attentively to his devotees' spiritual difficulties and give his advice. This knowledge encouraged me to explain to him slowly and briefly in clear, simple English the agitations of my mind. After I finished, he remained pensive for a few seconds and, then, in the same language but with considerable deliberation, said: 'Yes, you are right; all preconceptions must go. Practice alone will show you where the truth lies. Stick to only one form of *sadhana*.'

"That was a clear pointer. But apart from the words he uttered, I was suddenly gripped by an overwhelming urge to surrender unreservedly to him to guide me in my spiritual hunger, abandoning all the methods I had previously followed and all the beliefs on which I had built my hopes. My fate and all that I was, passed from that moment into the sacred hands of Sri Bhagavan for ever."

But this was not the only case of spontaneous surrender.

Spiritual surrender, we are told, is not a mental, still less an oral act, but the result of Grace, which comes in its own time and of its own accord, to cause the automatic subsidence of that self-asserting element in the *sadhaka's* nature, which stands in his way to ultimate realisation. Sometimes it is

sudden, and sometimes so gradual, that the devotee himself may not become aware of it. Grace, though it comes from the Guru by his very presence, is not fortuitous, but fully earned by hard internal fight, by long periods of suffering, prayer, self-purification, and intense yearning for release. Suffering turns the mind inward and eventually draws out the cry from the depths of the soul for the liberating light of Truth, and for the appearance of the Divine Teacher, who alone can lead to it and, thus, to Redemption.

PART II
TALKS

INTRODUCTORY

Visitors to the Ashram come from all parts of the world and all strata of society. The questions they ask naturally reflect their mental outlooks, their religious and philosophical beliefs, their social concepts, their personal predilections and phobias, their inner urges and so on. Many of them reveal a genuine desire to know the truth, and even spiritual hunger.

As a rule, all questions, except the impossible and the patently argumentative, Bhagavan graciously answers – fully, spontaneously, and calmly. Some answers are couched in a humorous vein, when humour is inherent in the questions. Some have a punning ring about them, when he turns worldly questions into spiritual hints, which sometimes baffle the questioner. But the best are the ones which concern *sadhana* and yogic practice.

Most of the devotees who are counted by the thousand are *grihastas* (householders), who continue to lead their normal life in their homes, pursue their normal avocations, and follow his teaching in their meditation as best they can. Almost all of them make it a point to visit the Ashram from time to time to have his *darshan* and light the torch of their inner fervour from his divine flame, which helps keeping up their link with him and preserving their mental balance in the intervals.

A small minority have settled inside, or in the neighbourhood of the Ashram, of whom some serve in the Ashram, but the others take to meditation and study. All benefit by his company, for *guru-sanga* is said to be far more quickening than the ordinary *sat-sanga*.

Soon after my arrival at Tiruvannamalai, I conceived the idea of recording as many of the talks held in my presence and translated into English as I could. Bhagavan always spoke in Tamil, except when the questions were put in Telugu or Malayalam, when he answered in the same languages. The visitors who knew none of these South Indian languages received their answers through an interpreter in English. For, although the Maharshi could read and understand English very well, he could not speak it sufficiently well for lack of practice. All I had to do was to concentrate my whole attention on the talk, try to memorise it, and then jot it down verbatim in my notebook as faithfully as possible as soon as I returned to my room, when it was still fresh in my mind. It was all along forbidden to write or take down notes in the Hall, except the devotee appointed for that purpose, and he too was stopped after about two years. That was therefore my only device to preserve for myself at first hand the valuable oral teaching of the Master.

In the first year of my stay I was a keen and close questioner, mainly on the technique of meditation. Bhagavan's answers to these questions I recorded particularly carefully. Some of them appear here under my own initial C., or Mr. C. as that of the questioner. I have classified most of the notes according to subject and, as far as possible, in chronological order, beginning with the light ones, for the convenience of the reader.

I

LIGHT DIALOGUES

The great awe which Sri Bhagavan inspires makes him appear to new visitors too lofty, too majestic for humour, but soon afterwards they realise the fact that refined humour and wit emanate from that divine bliss which all spiritual Masters enjoy in an eminent degree. Their cosmic vision makes them view all phenomena and events as the mere play of the Lord – His *Leela*, His Cosmic Dance – which is all joy and beauty. But nothing is farther from my mind than to disparage anyone in recording the following dialogues or to exalt them as specimens of his humour: they merely reflect the minds of some visitors, as the serious questions reflect those of the more serious. It is but right that the reader should have a peep into both.

1. THE BELIEVER IN THE IMPERSONAL

Dr. H., of the small group of Americans, who spent a few weeks in the Ashram in February 1936, asked Sri Maharshi if there exists such a thing as a Personal God.

Bhagavan. Yes, Ishvara.

Dr. H. (with astonishment) What? with eyes, nose, ears, etc.?

Bh. Yes, if you have them why should not God also have them?

C. When I read in the Kabbala and the Puranas that God has these organs, I laugh.

Bh. Why don't you laugh at yourself for having them?

2. THE BUSINESS MAN

Sometime afterwards Dr. H. came alone again to the Ashram for a few days' stay. He had heard of the sanctity of the hill and of the number of disembodied *siddhas* (saints with psychic powers) who dwell in it in their astral bodies, and who at times were said to appear physically to some privileged persons. On the last night of his stay, he took it into his head to have his fill of the hill with, as he confided later to a friend, the secret hope of coming face to face with one of them. Being ignorant of the difficulty of the ground at night, he continued to roam among the boulders long after dark.

Sri Bhagavan, who in those days kept a watchful eye over newcomers, particularly foreigners, missed him, and, having been told that he had been seen going up late in the evening, he immediately despatched devotees with gas lamps in search of him. At last the American friend was found and brought down.

He entered the Hall jaded and with clothes wet from the drizzle that had fallen during his jaunt. There was a cane chair – the only one in the Hall – opposite Sri Bhagavan's sofa. On that chair he sat, and started telling his adventure on the hill. After finishing his story, he turned to Sri Bhagavan and naively said:-

American. Oh, Maharishi, if you give me Self Realisation, how grateful I'll be to you!

Bhagavan. Eum! Eum!

Am. Indeed I'll be very happy. Tomorrow I am leaving this place and shall always think of you.

Bh. (gently chuckling) You will never go.

Am. (thinking that Maharshi was going to use *siddhis* to

prevent him from going, he was very scared indeed.) How? I am certainly going. I have urgent work in the United States. My passport is ready, and my passage booked. I made all the necessary arrangements for my return journey. How do you mean I am not going?

Bh. (still chuckling) You will never go, because you never came. It was only the car, the ship, the train, etc., that moved. You did absolutely nothing but sit all the time, till you found yourself here.

Am. (with a sigh of relief) Oh *that!*

3. THE PEDANT

On a summer morning a middle-aged Tamilian entered and sat for about half an hour. His restlessness and rolling eyes suggested that he had something weighty on his mind. At last he spoke with an assumed humility, particularly as he chose to speak in English.

Visitor. Swami, we ignorant people read so much, hoping to have an inkling of Truth, but, alas, the more we read the more Truth recedes from our ken. I have read all the Western philosophers from Descartes to Bertrand Russell – they are all useless. But our Rishis differ among themselves. Shankara says, "Go on repeating 'I am Brahman' and you become Brahman." Madhvacharya says that the Soul is ever separated from Brahman. You say "Enquire 'who am I' and you will arrive." Many other teachers gave many other solutions. Is this not puzzling? Which of you is right?

V. (Having waited in vain for about five minutes, he resumed with a mildly raised tone) Swami, which way am I to go?

Bh. (with a gentle wave of the hand) Go the way you came.

4. THE MISSIONARY

A few spick-and-span Europeans entered the Hall one morning, slightly bowed to Bhagavan and sat in the front row. Their leader was immediately recognised as a veteran Missionary, famous for his fiery preachings in YMCAs., Christian colleges, and public halls of towns and cities in India. One of the others was his private secretary. The preacher began with a question to set the ball rolling towards his pet theme. After some answers Bhagavan eventually referred him to the Self as the ultimate reality, without knowing the identity and motive of the questioner. That was excuse enough for the latter to fire a stream of quotations from the Christian scripture with his own interpretations on them.

Fortunately, before he went very far, Major Chadwick who at that time usually meditated there, shouted a challenge from the other end of the Hall in a powerful stentorian voice, which took him completely by surprise and eventually made him think it wise to keep silent and soon afterwards leave the Hall with his party.

5. THE PHILOSOPHER

April, 1943. A young man in his teens, with blushing cheeks and a very soft, timorous voice asked:–

Youth. Swami, can I see God in this life? ......

Bhagavan. (gently smiling) First tell me who is the "I" in your question; who, what, and where God is, and what do you mean by "life"?

The youth dropped his eyes and remained silent.

An elderly man from the back rushed forward, produced a pencil, wrote a question on a piece of paper and handed it to the Maharshi. Bhagavan read it and smiled broadly. It was

a question on Time and Space.

Bhagavan. May I know who is putting this question – Space, yourself, or Time?

Visitor. Of course I.

Bh. Do you know that I?

V. (after a little hesitation) Leave the I-question to the philosophers and answer my question.

Voice. What? Is Time or Space dearer to you than your own self?

Bh. (seeing the visitor nonplussed) All these questions are superfluous. One thing you must bear in mind is that no question can be solved without Self-knowledge. On the realisation of the Self everything becomes clear and all problems are solved.

6. THE SCIENTIST

A fortnight later a science student strolled in.

Student. Science tells us that the atom is made of a nucleus in the centre, with electrons moving round it in the intervening space. Is the relation between God and the Perfect Man the same as these or different? I mean, although God and the *Jnani* are one unit, yet they preserve their separate identities.

Bh. Who is the Perfect Man?

Student. He who has perfected himself by *sadhana*.

Bh. So you think yourself imperfect that you ask this question. Will it not then be better for you to perform *sadhana* and perfect yourself and then you will know what happens? Why bother now about a state which comes only after Perfection. The fact is that you are even now perfect and your supposed imperfection is only your own creation.

2nd April 1937

7. THE SCEPTIC

A very busy Polish journalist came for a few hours this afternoon, within which time he expected to be shown the Truth in the clearest possible manner.

Pole. I have read in your books that one should enquire into the nature of one's 'I' in order to know the Truth, which you call the Self. From biological science I have my own answer to the question of my own identity. What I wish to know is, who are you, you who speak of, and seem to have experienced, the Self? If another man confirms your statement, and so will a million, then there is the probability of the Self.

Bh. Have you no self yourself? Are you then in the region of probabilities, even with regard to your own self?

P. Yes, one cannot be sure of anything; even God cannot be proved with absolute certainty.

Bh. Leave God alone for the present. What of yourself?

P. I want confirmation of the Self.

Bh. You seek confirmation of yourself from others? How do you know that others exist?

P. By my senses.

Bh. 'My' implies the 'I', which owns the senses. You take your existence for granted, at the same time ask others to prove it to you. Similarly you admit the certainty of your senses, which see others, whilst denying all certainty. You see how you contradict yourself. The fact is that there are no others: there is no such a person as 'you'. Each man, although addressed as 'you', styles himself as

'I'. Even the confirmation you demand from others comes only from the 'I'. 'You' and 'they' occur only to the 'I', without which they are meaningless.

P. If you are right, what becomes of progress and science?

Bh. Progress and science are meant only for the perceiving mind. For whom is the progress if the mind is absent, say, in deep sleep, or in a swoon? The goal of all progress and science, you admit, is Truth, which is the Pure Intelligence, the substratum Consciousness, from which the thinking mind sprouts, and into which it is ultimately dissolved, when what you call 'Perfection', to which science aspires to lead, is attained. This is what we call realisation of the Self, that is, realisation of the source of the mind.

II

LIFE, DEATH, REBIRTH AND SUICIDE

Death and, to a lesser degree, Life and Rebirth, form the subject-matter of the majority of the questions asked by visitors. Death is the greatest catastrophe men dread. Omar Khayyam who sang:

“. . . Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust and under Dust to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer and sans End,”

is not alone in taking man as the merest dust and the grave as his last destination. The horror of everlasting extinction grips and numbs all hearts, even the stoutest.

To the Maharshi, death, like life, is a mere thought. When you are “awake,” you incessantly think, and when you go to sleep and dream, you do not think any the lesser. But when you pass from dreamful to dreamless sleep, your thoughts cease and you enjoy undisturbed peace, till you wake again and resume your thinking and with it your restless, peace-less state.

Life is miserable because it consists of nothing but thoughts. When death strikes down the body, the dreamless, thought-free state prevails for a brief period, but soon thinking starts again in the dream – “astral” – world, and continues till a full “waking” takes place in a new body, after another dreamless lull. This daily cycle of waking and sleeping is a miniature of the cycle of life and death in man and the universe, of alternation of activity and rest. The substance of the former is thoughts and sensations and of the latter the peaceful being

from which these arise. To transcend birth and death we have, therefore, to transcend the processes of thought and abide in the eternal being.

* * * *

4th January, 1937

1. A visitor asks Sri Maharshi:

Visitor. How can the terrible fear of death be overcome?

Bhagavan. When does that fear seize you? Does it come when you do not see your body, say, in dreamless sleep, or when you are under chloroform? It haunts you only when you are fully "awake" and perceive the world, including your body. If you do not see these and remain your pure self, as in dreamless sleep, no fear can touch you.

If you trace this fear to the object, the loss of which gives rise to it, you will find that that object is not the body, but the mind which functions in it and through which the environment and the attractive world is known as sights, sounds, smells, etc. Many a man would be too glad to be rid of his diseased body and all the problems and inconvenience it creates for him if continued awareness were vouchsafed to him. It is the awareness, the consciousness, and not the body, he fears to lose. Men love existence because it is eternal awareness, which is their own Self. Why not then hold on to the pure awareness right now, while in the body and be free from all fear?

2. A Mysorean, Mr. M. had read some Theosophical books and stayed here for some months trying to digest them. He wanted to know about rebirths.

M. Theosophy speaks of 50 to 10,000-year intervals between death and rebirth. Why is this so?

Bh. There is no relation between the standard of measurements of one state of consciousness and another. All such measurements are hypothetical. It is true that some individuals take more time and some less. But it must be distinctly understood that it is not the soul that comes and goes, but the thinking mind of the individual, which makes it appear to do so. On whatever plane the mind happens to act, it creates a body for itself: in the physical world a physical body, in the dream world a dream body, which becomes wet with dream rain and sick with dream diseases. After the death of the physical body, the mind remains inactive for some time, as in dreamless sleep, when it remains worldless and therefore bodiless. But soon it becomes active again in a new world and a new body – the astral, – till it assumes another body in what is called a "rebirth". But the *Jnani*, the Self-Realised man, whose mind has already ceased to act, remains unaffected by death: it has dropped never to rise again to cause births and deaths. The chain of illusions has snapped forever for him.

It is now clear that there is neither real birth, nor real death. It is the mind which creates and maintains the illusion of reality in this process, till it is destroyed by Self-Realisation.

* * * *

12th April, 1937

3. A Dutch lady, Mrs. Gonggrijp, a resident of Adyar, is here on a three-day visit. She wants to know the cause of the urge to live, known in the Pali scriptures by the name of *Tanha*, which is inherent in all life.

Mrs. G. What is the cause of *tanha*, thirst for life, thirst for rebirth?

Bh. Real rebirth is dying from the ego into the Spirit. This is the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus. Whenever identification with the body exists, a body is always available, whether in this or in any other one, till the body-sense disappears by merging into the Source – the Spirit, or Self. The stone which is projected upwards remains in constant motion, till it returns to its source, the earth, and rests. Headache continues to give trouble, till the pre-headache state is regained.

Thirst for life is inherent in the very nature of life, which is Absolute Existence – *Sat*. Although indestructible by nature, by false identification with its destructible instrument, the body, consciousness imbibes a false apprehension of its destructibility, hence it tries to perpetuate that instrument, which results in a succession of births. But however long these bodies may last, they eventually come to an end and yield to the Self, which alone eternally exists.

Mr. C. Yes, "Give up thy life if thou wouldst live," says the "Voice of the Silence" of H. P. Blavatsky.

Bh. Give up the false identification and, remember, the body cannot exist without the Self, whereas the Self can exist without the body; in fact it is always without it.

Mr. C. A doubt has just now arisen in Mrs. G's mind, as she has just heard that a human being may take an animal birth in some other life, which is contrary to what Theosophy has taught her.

Bh. Let him who takes birth ask this question. Find out first who it is that is born, and whether there are actual birth and death. These are only of the ego, which is an illusion of the mind.

5th May, 1943

4. Mr. B. is a keen devotee of Sri Bhagavan. A few days ago he lost his only son, which shook his faith in the Maharshi and in God's grace. For some days he went on strike by staying away from the Ashram, but today he came in "to have it out" with Sri Bhagavan with a long list of questions which he had prepared. After receiving some answers he was satisfied.

Mr. B. What is Faith?

Bh. Faith, Love, Grace, are all your nature, the Self.

B. If so, Faith and Grace are obtainable only on the Realisation of the Self. All that we call Faith etc., before then is variable and untrue.

Bh. Quite so.

B. Is sorrow a thought?

Bh. All thoughts are sorrowful.

B. Even pleasurable thoughts must be also sorrowful.

Bh. Yes, because thoughts take one's attention away from the Self, which is undiluted Happiness.

B. What made Bhagavan come to Arunachala?

Bh. What made you all come?

B. By that I want to know whether there has been any difference in Bhagavan's spiritual outlook between the day he left Madura and now.

Bh. None at all: the same experience has prevailed throughout without change.

B. Then where was the need for Bhagavan to write hymns in praise of Arunachala? Was that for him or for us?

Bh. I do not know why I wrote them. It might have been for others.

B. What is Life?

Bh. Materially speaking Life is the body; spiritually speaking it is the Ultimate Consciousness. It depends on how you look at it.

B. What is Death?

Bh. It is oblivion of one's real nature.

At this stage a visitor interrupted by asking whether suicide was a wrong act.

Bh. Killing the innocent body is certainly wrong. Suicide must be committed on the mind, where the suffering is deposited, and not on the body, which is insentient and feels nothing. The mind is the real culprit, being the creator of the anguish which tempts to suicide, but by an error of judgement, the innocent, insentient body is punished for it.

* * * *

3rd September, 1948

5. Three Anglo-Indian lady-doctors came from Bangalore. One of them had recently lost her husband in an air crash. She asked Sri Bhagavan:

Lady. Is there rebirth?

Bh. Do you know what birth is?

L. O yes, I know that I exist now, but I want to know if I'll exist in the future.

Bh. Past!.... Present!.... Future!....

L. Yes, today is the result of yesterday, the Past, and tomorrow, the Future, will be the result of today, the Present. Am I right?

Bh. There is neither Past nor Future. There is only the Present. Yesterday was the present to you when you experienced it, and tomorrow will be also the present when you will experience it. Therefore experience takes place only in the present, and beyond experience nothing exists.

L. Are then Past and Future mere imagination?

Bh. Yes, even the Present is mere imagination, for the sense of time is purely mental. Space is similarly mental; therefore birth and rebirth, which take place in time and space cannot be other than imagination.

* * * *

22nd February, 1949

6. A well-educated North Indian came forward, prostrated to Sri Bhagavan and sat in the front line. He asked in excellent English:

Visitor. What is the cause and origin of the universe?

Bh. Have you no worries of your own?

V. Of course I have; that is why I want to know about Life, Death, Consciousness, etc.

Bh. Begin with the beginning: who has Life, Consciousness, etc.? Have you, for instance, life?

V. Of course I know I am alive, for I see my body.

Bh. Do you always see the body? What happens to it and to the universe when you go to sleep?

V. I don't know, it is a mystery.

Bh. You may not know what happens to them, but do you for that reason cease to exist?

V. I don't know.

Bh. How do you then know that you exist even now?

V. Now I have awareness and see my body moving and thinking.

Bh. But you see your body also moving and thinking and being in all sorts of places while it is actually lying fast asleep in Tiruvannamalai.

V. It is a mystery. Can I say that I, the permanent, am ever present and only my ego changes?

Bh. So you think you are two persons: the permanent 'I' and the ego. Is that possible?

V. Then please show me the way to the Real.

Bh.The Real is ever-present, like the screen on which all the cinematographic pictures move. While the pictures appear on it, it remains invisible. Stop the pictures, and the screen, which has all along been present, in fact the only object that has existed throughout, will become clear. All these universes, humans, objects, thoughts and events are merely pictures moving on the screen of Pure Consciousness, which alone is real. Shapes and phenomena pass away, but Consciousness remains ever.

A few days later Sri Bhagavan gave a different answer to a similar question asked by Dr. Godel, a French Medical Officer of the Suez Canal. He told the doctor: "You must distinguish between the 'I', pure in itself, and the 'I'-thought. The latter, being merely a thought, sees subject and object, sleeps, wakes up, eats and thinks, dies and is reborn. But the pure 'I' is the pure Being, eternal existence, free from ignorance and thought-illusion. If you stay as the 'I', your being alone, without thought, the I-thought will disappear and the delusion will vanish

forever. In a cinema-show you can see pictures only in a very dim light or in darkness. But when all lights are switched on, all pictures disappear. So also in the flood-light of the Supreme *Atman* all objects disappear."

Dr. G. That is the Transcendental State.

Bh. No, transcending what, and by whom? You alone exist.

III

HAPPINESS AND MISERY IN CREATION

4th May, 1937

A book is being read in which a question occurs whether the world was created for happiness or misery. All eyes turn to Sri Bhagavan for the answer.

Bhagavan. Creation is neither good nor bad; it is as it is. It is the human mind which puts all sorts of constructions on it, as it sees things from its own angle and as it suits its own interests. A woman is just a woman, but one mind calls her "mother," another "sister," and still another "aunt" and so on. Men love women, hate snakes, and are indifferent to the grass and stones by the roadside. These connections are the causes of all the misery in the world. Creation is like a peepul tree: birds come to eat its fruit, or take shelter under its branches, men cool themselves in its shade, but some may hang themselves on it. Yet the tree continues to lead its quiet life, unconcerned with, and unaware of, all the uses it is put to. It is the human mind that creates its own difficulties and then cries for help. Is God so partial as to give peace to one person and sorrow to another? In creation there is room for everything, but man refuses to see the good, the healthy and the beautiful, and goes on whining, like the hungry man who sits beside a tasty dish and, instead of stretching out his hand to satisfy his hunger, he goes on lamenting.

Whose fault is it, God's or man's? But fortunately for man, God, in His infinite mercy, never forsakes him. He always gives him new chances by providing Gurus and Scriptures to guide him to find the errors of his ways and ultimately gain eternal happiness.

Visitor. We know that the pleasures of this world are useless and even painful, yet we long for them. What is the way of ending that longing?

Bhagavan. Think of God and attachments will gradually drop from you. If you wait till all desires disappear to start your devotion and prayer, you will have to wait a very, very long time indeed.

IV

KARMA

15th August, 1948

A visitor from the North seemed to be extremely agitated. With much emotion he asked several searching questions, one of which, was why there was so much evil in the world, and why should evil-doers be more successful than good-doers? If it were due to Karma, who made that Karma, and why should it be so arbitrarily dispensed – various karma to various individuals, which become the cause of so much misery and turmoil? Sri Bhagavan, realising the agony of the questioner's heart, was infinitely gracious to him. He answered all his questions pithily and with amazing clarity. About karma he said: "Whose karma is it? There are two creations, one God's and the other man's. The former is single and free from karma. The latter is varied and has varied karmas. If man removes his own creation, there will be no varied individuals and no varied karmas; misery will thus disappear. He who kills man's creation sees heaven only, the others see only hell.

"It is every intelligent man's experience that evil-doing recoils on the doer sooner or later. Why is this so? Because the Self is one in all. When seeing others you are only seeing yourself in their shapes. 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' means that you should love him, because he is your Self."

V

FREE-WILL, UNPREMEDITATED ACTION

19th June, 1936

1. A visitor wanted to know if there was such a thing as Free-Will.

Bh. Whose will is it? So long as there is the sense of doership, there is the sense of enjoyment and of individual will. But if this sense is lost through the practice of *vichara*, the Divine will, will act and guide the course of events. Fate is overcome by *Jnana*, Self-knowledge, which is beyond Will and Fate.

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9th November, 1936

2. Mr C. asks where the will is located in the sheaths of the *jiva*.

Bh. The Will is the purposive force of the 'I', which determines and impels an act. It is thus inherent in the 'I'. In which sheath is it located? It must be where the 'I'-sense is, namely, in the *vijnanamayakosha*.

Annamayakosha is the physical sheath. *Pranamayakosha* is the sheath of the life and sense. *Manomayakosha* is that of thoughts and sense-perceptions – of subject and object: and *vijnanamayakosha* is the sheath of the 'I'-sense, where the self-conscious individual wills and determines. It is really unnecessary to go into all this detail. What we

should be concerned with is the true nature of the 'I', which is the pivot of all these sheaths and worlds. The true 'I' is the Supreme Reality.

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19th May, 1936

3. A French Doctor of Philosophy came for the day. He asked: "How should a seeker work?"

Bh. Without taking himself to be the actor, that is he should work without motive or a hard-cast plan. For instance, when you started on a journey from Paris did you include this place in your itinerary?

Dr. No.

Bh. Now you see how you came without previous planning. The Gita says that no one can remain inactive, and that the purpose of one's birth will be fulfilled whether one wills it or not. It is therefore wise to allow the purpose to be fulfilled by itself.

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10th February, 1944

4. In this connection it is relevant to record here a single instance of how the Divine Will automatically acted to the benefit of a devotee through an unpremeditated action.

About a month ago Shiva, one of the Master's attendants, was for some reason dismissed from service, and he immediately left for his village. Last night he returned and related the following story to Sri Bhagavan in our presence. He said:–

"As I detrained at the railway station of my village on the next day of my leaving the Ashram, about a month ago, I

saw a relation of mine there. Seeing me, he came running and shouted: ‘Hello, you have come, I was just going to send you this telegram. Your father is dying and wants to see you badly.’ I was stunned and realised that I had been dismissed from service so that I might be there in time. When I entered my home, my father, who had not been opening his eyes or talking, suddenly opened them and, seeing me, smiled and said: ‘At last you have come, *santosham* (I am happy).’ After an hour he breathed his last.”

VI

EGO

17th February, 1937

1. Mrs. D. Jinarajadasa, wife of the late President of the Theosophical Society and resident of Adyar, Madras, wanted to go to the root of the human ego, which is the cause of so much discord between nations, families and individuals.

Mrs. J. What is the difference between the ego and the Self?

Bh. That which comes and goes, rises and sets, is born and dies is the ego. That which always abides, never changes and is devoid of qualities is the Self.

Mrs. J. Can I say that God is the Flame and we are the sparks?

Bh. Although the sparks rise from the flame, they fall away from it into space, whereas we are never outside God.

Mrs. J. But is there a God apart from ourselves? Naturally there must be a creator to this universe.

Bh. If by "ourselves" you mean your body, then there is a creator, but if you mean the pure Self, then there is nothing but It. If you objectify and see a universe, then you are bound to see many things beside yourself and postulate a God, the creator. Body, God and world rise and set together from, and into, the Self. If God is apart from the Self, then He would be Self-less, that is, outside existence, that is, non-existent.

Mrs. J. I suppose one has to sublimate the ego-self into the true Self.

Bh. The ego-self does not exist at all.

Mrs. J. Then why does it give so much trouble? Look at the havoc it has created among nations and people. It is dreadful even to oneself.

Bh. To whom is the trouble? The trouble also is imagined. Pain and pleasure are to the ego, which is itself imagined. When the ego disappears through constant enquiry into its nature, the illusion of pleasure and pain also disappears, and the Self, their source, alone remains. There is neither ego nor ignorance in Reality.

Mrs. J. But how did the ego arise?

Bh. Ego is non-existent, otherwise you would be two instead of one – you the ego and you the Self. You are a single, indivisible whole. Enquire into yourself, and the apparent ego and ignorance will disappear.

Mrs. J. Why then do we need to concentrate?

Bh. Concentration, meditation and all spiritual practices are not performed with the object of realising the Self, because the Self is ever-present, but of realising the non-existence of ignorance. Every man admits his own existence and does not need a mirror to prove it to him. Existence is awareness, which is the negation of ignorance. Then why does a man suffer? Because he imagines himself other than what he in reality is, e.g., the body, this, that, and the other – "I am Gopal, son of Parashuram, father of Natesan," etc. In reality he is the intelligent "I-am" alone, stripped of qualities and superimpositions, of names and forms. Does he see his body and all these qualities, shapes and colours in dreamless sleep? Yet he does not deny that he is then himself existing even without a body. He must hold on to that existence, that lone being – *Kaivalya* –

even when he is in the waking state. The man of wisdom simply is. "I-Am-That-I-Am" sums up the whole Truth. The method is summed up by "Be still and know that I am God." What does stillness mean? Cessation of thinking, which is the universe of forms, colours, qualities, time, space, all concepts and precepts whatever.

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A visitor asked "If the ego or 'I' be an illusion who then casts off the illusion?"

Bh. The 'I' casts off the illusion of 'I' and yet remains as 'I'. This appears to be a paradox to you: it is not so to the *Jnani*. Take the case of the *bhakta*. His 'I' prays to the Lord to unite it with Him, which is its surrender. What remains as residuum after this surrender, is the eternal 'I', which is God the Absolute, *Paramatman* Himself. What has happened to the 'I', which originally prayed? Being unreal, it simply vanished.

* * * *

18th November, 1936

2. *Visitor*. *Sushupti* is so peaceful that one would love to stay as long as possible in it, but cannot, why?

Bh. We are ever in *sushupti*. Becoming aware of it in *jagrat* is *samadhi*. The *ajnani* cannot remain long in *sushupti* because his ego pushes him out of it. The *Jnani*, although he has scotched the ego, it continues to rise again and again due to *prarabdha*. So, for both the *Jnani* and the *ajnani* the ego springs up, but with this difference: whereas the *Jnani's* enjoys the transcendental experience, keeping its *lakshya* (aim, attention) always fixed on its

source, that of the *ajnani* is completely ignorant of it. The former is not harmful, being a mere skeleton of its normal self, like a burnt up rope. By constantly fixing its attention on the Source, the Heart, the ego gets dissolved into it like a salt doll which has fallen into the ocean.

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14th March, 1943

3. Professor M. Venkataramiah (later Swami Ramananda Saraswati) asked whether the light which gives the "*Aham*" – 'I'-sense – identity and knowledge (of the world) is ignorance or *chit* (Pure Consciousness). Sri Bhagavan replied:–

Bh. It is only the reflected light of *chit* that makes the 'I' believe itself different from others and create the objects. For reflection there must be a surface on which the reflection takes place.

Ella Maillart. What is that surface?

Bh. On realisation of the Self you will find that the reflection and the surface on which it takes place do not actually exist, but that both of them are one and the same *chit*. There is the world, which requires location for its existence and light to make it perceptible. Both rise simultaneously. Therefore physical existence and perception depend upon the light of the mind which is reflected from the Self. Just as cinematographic pictures can be made visible by a reflected light, and only in darkness, so also the world pictures are perceptible only by the light of the Self reflected in the darkness of *avidya* (ignorance). The world can be seen neither in the utter darkness of ignorance, as in deep sleep, nor in the utter light of the Self, as in Self-realisation or *samadhi*.

VII

DANGER OF PHILOSOPHY

10th April, 1937

A highly learned visitor whose chief interest was man and his constitution, wanted Sri Bhagavan to explain from experience man's various bodies, his *koshas* and their functions, his *atma-buddhi-manas*, etc.

Bh. (after a brief explanation added) The intricate maze of philosophy of different schools claims to clarify matters and reveal the Truth, but in fact they create confusion where no confusion need exist. To understand anything there must needs be the understanding being. Why worry about his bodies, his *ahankar*, his *buddhi*, creation, God, *Mahatmas*, world – the not-Self – at all? Why not remain yourself and be in peace? Take Vedanta, for instance: it speaks of the fifteen *pranas*, the names and functions of which the student is asked to commit to memory. Will it not be sufficient if he is taught that only one *prana* does the whole work of maintaining life in the body? Again, the *antahkarana* is said to think, to desire, to will, to reason, etc. Why all these details? Has anyone seen the *antahkarana*, or all these *pranas*? Do they really exist? They are all conceptual divisions invented by teachers of philosophy by their excessive analysis. Where do all these concepts end? Why should confusion be created and then explained away? Fortunate is the man who does not lose himself in the labyrinths of philosophy, but goes straight to the Source from which they all rise.

VIII

SURRENDER

Visitor. What is self-surrender?

Bh. It is the same as mind-control. The ego submits when it recognises the higher authority of the *Atman*. This is the beginning of surrender. Although the ego cannot exist without the Self, yet, due to its ignorance of this fact, it remains rebellious, and acts on its own initiatives and by its own will.

V. How can the rebellious ego be subjugated?

Bh. Either by seeking its source, when it automatically disappears, or by deliberately surrendering all its actions, motives and decisions, striking thereby at its root. Habits create the false notion that thinking is a permanent institution, with which it is impossible to dispense, but enquiry and discrimination will blast this fallacy. None succeeds without effort and the successful few owe their victory to perseverance.

V. People prostrate before God or the Guru to prove, I suppose, or at least to show their surrender.

Bh. True surrender is the melting of the ego in its Source, the Heart. God is not deceived by physical genuflections; what He sees in the worshipper is how much of the ego remains in full control and how much is on the verge of self-destruction.

IX

MAYA

Of all the aspects of Advaita philosophy that of Maya is the most difficult to understand, still more to explain. Some interpret it as ignorance, others as dream, others still as illusion, and nothing but experience can explain it satisfactorily. In the meantime considerable misunderstanding is created by explanations – the more it is explained, the more obscure it becomes.

In one of the Ashrams I visited in 1939 I met a Canadian lady. She had come to India "in search of Truth," and had visited many yogis and Ashrams, the last of which was the Ramakrishna Mutt in Madras. We talked as usual on yoga, meditation, etc., but when I mentioned the word "*maya*", she gasped, clutched her throat, and dropped her voice: "Don't say it," she whispered, "those people of Ramakrishna Mission were about to destroy me, but God came to my rescue and I escaped."

I. How do you mean, did they want to kill you? They are *sannyasis*.

She. Not my body, but my soul. They told me that nothing exists: no world, no human beings, no trees, nothing, nothing – all is illusion, all my own imagination, and that I cannot kill the illusion till I surrender myself. Where will I be without my soul and mind?

I had no alternative but to change the subject.

But Sri Bhagavan's explanations are superb, as will be seen from the following dialogues.

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15th April, 1937

1. Mr. C. wanted to know the mystery of this gigantic world illusion.

C. We speak of the world as illusion, yet everything in it follows rigid laws, which proves it to be well-planned and well-regulated.

Bhagavan. Yes, he who projected the illusion gave it the appearance of order and sound planning.

C. All spiritual institutions except the Advaitic give prominence to the creative aspect of Reality, which they name God. They speak of prophets, saints, scriptures, etc. Are they all illusion?

Bh. They all exist in the same way as you, the questioner, exist. You are in the relative world, so they are; or else you would not have known of them. In dreams one also sees a well-regulated world with saints, scriptures, etc., but the moment one wakes up they all disappear. So also waking from this dream world into the Supreme Consciousness causes them all to disappear.

C. But how out of Truth does illusion, falsehood spring up?

Bh. *Maya* is not falsehood, although it has the appearance of it, but the active side of Reality. It is the maker of forms in Consciousness and form means variety, which causes illusion – mind you, all this variety is in consciousness and nowhere else; it is only in the mind. One *jiva*, seeing another *jiva*, forgets its identity with it and thinks of it as separate from itself. But the moment it turns its attention on its own nature as consciousness, and not as form, the illusion of diversity or separateness breaks as a dream breaks when waking takes place.

C. It is hard to conceive God, the formless, giving rise to forms.

Bh. Why hard? Does not your mind remain formless when you do not perceive or think, say, in deep sleep, in *samadhi*, or in a swoon? And does it not create space and relationship when it thinks and impels your body to act? Just as your mind devises and your body executes in one homogeneous, automatic act, so automatic, in fact, that most people are not aware of the process, so does the Divine Intelligence devise and plan and His Energy automatically and spontaneously acts – the thought and the act are one integral whole. This Creative Energy which is implicit in Pure Intelligence is called by various names, one of which is *maya* or *shakti*, the Creator of forms or images.

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14th June, 1948

2. Mr. Subbaramayyah, the late Professor of English, is a frequent visitor. Whenever he comes he discusses ancient Vedantic books with the Master. Today's talk is about *Kaivalyam*. *Maya* comes up in the middle and claims attention. Sri Bhagavan explains:

"Every plane has its own illusion, which can be destroyed only by another illusion on the same plane. For example, a man takes a full meal and goes to sleep. He dreams of being hungry in spite of the *jagrat* food in his stomach. To satisfy the dream hunger, he has to take dream food. A wound in dream requires dream treatment. A great king once dreamt that he was ill but was too poor to call a doctor. He had to beg the doctor's fees from his friends to receive medical help. Although he had fabulous wealth in the waking state, it could be of no use to him in the dream state. Similarly the illusion

of *ajnana* (ignorance) can be destroyed only by the illusion of *guru-upadesa* (the Master's teaching). *Mukti* (liberation) is ever-present and bondage ever-absent, yet the universal experience is the reverse."

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16th February, 1937

3. A visitor remarks that it is cruel of God's *leela* to make the knowledge of the Self so hard.

Bh. (laughing) - *Knowing* the Self is *being* the Self, and being means existence – one's own existence, which no one denies, any more than one denies one's eyes, although one cannot see them. The trouble lies with your desire to objectify the Self, in the same way as you objectify your eyes when you place a mirror before them. You have been so accustomed to objectivity that you lost the knowledge of yourself, simply because the Self cannot be objectified. Who is to know the self? Can the insentient body know it? All the time you speak and think of your 'I', 'I', 'I', yet when questioned you deny knowledge of it. You are the Self, yet you ask how to know the Self. Where then is God's *leela* and where its cruelty? It is because of this denial of the Self by people that the Shastras speak of *maya, leela*, etc.

* * * *

15th April, 1937

4. A frequent visitor to the Ashram is cogitating over the problem of *Maya* and its relation to the waking and dream states.

V. Is there any genuine difference between the experience of *jagrat* and that of dreams?

Bh. None, except that *jagrat* appears to be more enduring than the other to the person who is in *jagrat*, though not so to the dreamer himself. The person in *jagrat* relates his dream to have sometimes covered hundreds of years, hence he calls it transitory, whereas actually there is not the slightest difference between the nature of the two states.

C. There is this difference: each time we return to *jagrat*, we come to the same place, same people, same activities and interests, which is not the case with going to the *svapna* state.

Bh. This is because things move very rapidly in dreams, as they appear now to you in *jagrat*. But each time you go to the dream world do you feel being a stranger in it? Do you not feel thoroughly at home with the people and places as you do here? Don't you sometimes dream of being a minister, or meeting your father who had died in *jagrat* long ago, or seeing God seated on a throne, etc., without noticing any incongruity in it? The dream is as real then to you as *jagrat* is now. Where is the difference? If you call the dream illusion, why do you not do so to *jagrat* also?

V. Arjuna saw the Divine Form of Sri Krishna. Was that vision true?

Bh. Sri Krishna started the discourse in Chapter II of the Bhagavad Gita with: "I have no form," etc., but in Chapter XI, He said: "I transcend the three worlds . . . ," yet Arjuna saw these in Him. Again Sri Krishna said: "I am Time." Does time have a form? If the universe is His form, should it not be uniform and changeless, He being the Changeless One? The solution to these apparent

contradictions lies in His statement to Arjuna: "See in Me all you desire to see. . . ," which means that His form varies according to the desires and conceptions of the seer. Men speak of divine visions, yet paint them differently with the seer himself in the scene. Even hypnotists can make one see strange scenes and phenomena, which you condemn as tricks and jugglery, whereas the former you extol as Divine. Why is this difference? The fact is that all sights are unreal, whether they come from the senses or the mind as pure concepts. THIS IS THE TRUTH.

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4th January, 1937

5. A disciple remarks that Sri Bhagavan often says that *maya* and Reality are the same. How can that be?

Bh. Shankara was criticised for his views on *Maya* without understanding him. He said that (1) *Brahman* is real, (2) The universe is unreal, and (3) *Brahman* is the universe. He did not stop at the second, because the third explains the other two. It signifies that the universe is real if perceived as the Self, and unreal if perceived apart from the Self. Hence *Maya* and Reality are one and the same.

X

GURU

The rise of a new political ideology in the West after the first World War made men intolerant of all authority. The forces it released and the spirit of rebellion it disseminated everywhere had such extremely wide repercussions that its influence stamped itself on most of the new world literature. It invaded even the spiritual sphere and coloured the views of the rising generation of preachers, who became the Messiahs of the new age.

The truly-seeking minds were thus caught between the spirit of the new age and that of the venerable traditions and scriptures, which had, throughout the centuries, produced spiritual giants who led millions "from the unreal to the Real and from death to Immortality."

It is small wonder then that bewildered, earnest, truth-hungry men should anxiously visit the Maharshi and seek his advice on the need or otherwise of a guru.

* * * *

June, 1937

Visitor. I have been following a certain school of thought, which completely dispenses with gurus. But after many years of deep thinking I have now come to the conclusion that a guide is absolutely essential on the difficult path which leads to spiritual liberation. I take Bhagavan to have reached the Highest, and so I beg of him to enlighten me.

Bh. All scriptures recommend spiritual teachers. The guru is none other than the goal men seek, the Self. As the seeker's mind is bent outward, the Self takes a human shape as a guru to help driving it inward. Thayumanavar says that God, Self, or Guru appears as a man to dispel the ignorance of man, just as a deer is used as a decoy to capture a wild deer. He has to appear in a body in order to dispel the "I-am-the-body" notion of the seeker.

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30th October, 1945

2. Sri Dilip Kumar Roy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram this morning sang in the presence of Maharshi in the Hall and in the evening asked the following questions:

Dilip. Some people reported you to have said that there was no need for a guru. Others gave the opposite report. What does Maharshi say?

Bh. I have never said that there is no need for a guru.

D. Sri Aurobindo and others refer to you as having had no guru.

Bh. All depends on what you call guru. He need not be in a human form. Dattatreya had twenty-four gurus: the five elements – earth, water, etc., which means that every object in this world was his guru. Guru is absolutely necessary. The Upanishads say that none but a guru can take a man out of the jungle of intellect and sense-perceptions. So there must be a guru.

D. I mean a human guru – the Maharshi did not have one.

Bh. I might have had one at one time or other. But did I not sing hymns to Arunachala? What is a guru? Guru is God or the Self. First a man prays to God to fulfil his desires.

A time comes when he will no more pray for the fulfilment of material desires but for God Himself. God then appears to him in some form or other, human or non-human, to guide him to Himself in answer to his prayer and according to his needs.

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19th February, 1937

3. Mrs. Jinarajadasa, an old Theosophist and later a follower of Sri J. Krishnamurti:

Mrs. J. In Mrs. Besant's time we used to spend such a lot of time meditating on the Masters. Are Masters really useful?

Bh. Masters do exist externally as long as the pupil feels himself to be the body. As such they are useful to teach him the truth about himself. Once the pupil experiences the Truth and breaks the body illusion, he realises the Masters to be the same as himself, namely, the Supreme Consciousness, or Self. If there are Masters outside the Self, then they are not real, being external additions, for he who comes will also go, that is, is impermanent. The fact is Self, Master and God are one and the same.

Mme. de Rathonyi. Oh! We are far from this truth!

Bh. How many miles are you far from it? Do you deny your existence? If not, how can you deny Reality, which is pure existence, the Self?

XI

MEDITATION

Meditation means many things to many individuals and ranges from quiet brooding on a concept or an ideal to the beatitude of the highest spiritual contemplation. But in the *sadhana* propounded by the Maharshi it strictly means, whatever the method, the attempt to still the thinking faculty, the perpetually-surging waves of the mind, in order that the calm ocean of pure awareness, from which they rise and on which they move, may be experienced.

To beginners this mind control appears to be a formidable feat, yet the Master encourages them to go ahead and practise – at all events to make a beginning. He constantly dins into us the inspiring notion that we are already Self-realised and that, if we are not aware of it, the obstruction to that awareness should be removed by investigation – *vichara* – which is as logical as it is simple.

To hear it direct from him this "Self-knowledge", rather the way to Self-knowledge, is "the easiest thing there is" (*Atma Vidya*); but, judging from the questions constantly asked of him, and later of his disciples, there appears to be the need for much spade work before its central idea takes a firm hold on the seeker. The Master's obvious meaning seems to be that, even apart from the psychological efficacy of the *vichara* proper, preoccupying the mind with a single theme to the exclusion of all others, if doggedly practised, will not fail to produce beneficial

results. It will tend to reduce the oscillations of the thinking processes, and thus render the mind amenable to concentration on the supremely important work which is to follow, which by itself is a splendid achievement. Finding the answer to the query "Who am I?" is not the immediate burden of the practice in the beginning. Stability and fixity of the restless, mercurial mind is the first aim, and this can be achieved by constant practice and by frequently pulling oneself back to the subject of the meditation whenever the mind strays away.

When the mind has attained an appreciable degree of concentration, which means of depth, it will be time to think of the answer. Some *sadhakas* are fortunate enough to begin with a mind already accustomed to concentration, either "naturally", or by training, or through intense fervour, so that they are able to go straight to the application of the *vichara*, and thus make a more or less rapid progress, according to the intensity of their determination, without much strain. For the Master tells us that mental calmness, that is, controlled mind, is essential for a successful meditation (*vide* p. 94).

The next idea in the *vichara* seems to be that wherever, and for however long, one may search for the answer in meditation, one will certainly not find it in the physical body; for no part of it is intelligent enough to stand the test of analysis or answer the call. Even if the meditator takes his body as a whole and confers on it his name, say, Krishna or Peter, sooner or later he will discover that it is only his mind which is responsible for this as well as all other thoughts and sensations. Thus diligent search and keen observation eventually lead to the mind as the perceiver, desirer and enjoyer of a world which is entirely its own thoughts; for the mind cognises naught but its own ideas.

The final idea, one gathers, refers to the most vital stage of the *vichara*, when the foregoing fact has become a settled conviction and the seeker unabatingly continues his inquiry, this time no longer into the insentient body, but into the very nature of the mind, from which he has discovered the 'I' thought to have arisen. Meditation has by then taken a firm grip and has turned from an erstwhile painful and apparently fruitless effort to a joyful, eagerly-looked-forward-to performance, which can no longer be abandoned or even slackened. The thinking processes have by now considerably slowed down and with it, naturally, the restlessness of the mind. Profound peace and inner joy impel more frequent and longer meditation, which in turn reduces thinking still further, till the moment of full maturity is reached, when all of a sudden all thoughts completely cease, and the meditator, the 'I', having nothing to disturb or preoccupy him, spontaneously finds himself in his pure Being, which is the Absolute State or Substratum. This is what the second and third *sutras* of Patanjali's yoga mean by saying:

"Yoga is the suppression of the *vritti* (modifications of the thinking principle). Then the seer abides in himself."

And what is that Self in actual experience? Sri Bhagavan tells us that it is the Light which ever shines in the Cave of the Heart as the flame of the Consciousness 'I' 'I' – the eternal and blissful *Sat-chit-ananda*. This is the answer to the *vichara* and its fulfilment. The 'I', which has carried out a determined and protracted search into its own nature, has at long last found itself to be not other than the Pure Mind, the immaculate Being, which is eternally wrapped in blissful stillness. This is *Turiya*, the Fourth, or *Samadhi*. There remains nothing more for one to achieve but to consolidate this state

into the permanent experience of *Sahaja Nirvikalpa*, which is the Great Liberation.

Sadhakas take courage from the personal assurance of Sri Maharshi and the testimony of those who have found the Ultimate Peace, and relentlessly continue their efforts however sterile these may at first appear to be, strong in the belief of the descent of the Divine Grace on their endeavour to crown them with the greatest of all crowns, that of Supreme Enlightenment.

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16th May, 1936

1. Mr. C. relates how the reading of Patanjali *Sutras* in 1926 had greatly impressed him. The first few *sutras* had convinced him of the truth of the teaching, but unfortunately there was no one to give him proper guidance till he met Sri Bhagavan early in 1936.

Bh. Patanjali's first *sutras* are indeed the climax of all systems of yoga. All yogas aim at the cessation of the *vritti* (modification of the mind). This can be brought about in the variety of ways mentioned in the scriptures through mind control, which frees consciousness from all thoughts and keeps it pure. Effort is necessary. In fact effort is itself yoga.

C. I suppose efforts have to be made in the waking state, which implies that *moksha* can be gained only in *jagrat*.

Bh. Quite so, awareness is necessary for mind control; otherwise who is to make the effort? You cannot make it in sleep or under the influence of drugs. Also *mukti* has to be gained in full awareness, because the Reality itself is pure awareness.

C. There seems to be nothing but awareness, for to know anything there must be knowledge – we cannot get over that.

Bh. Certainly. Subjective knowledge – knowledge knowing itself is *jnana*. It is then the subject as the knower, the object as the known and the knowledge which connects them.

C. This last is not clear to me in this case.

Bh. Why so? Knowledge is the light which links the seer to the seen. Suppose you go in search of a book in a library in pitch darkness. Can you find it without light, although you, the subject, and the book, the object, are both present? Light has to be present to unite you. This link between the subject and the object in every experience is *chit*, consciousness. It is both the substratum as well as the witness of the experience, the seer of Patanjali.

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18th June, 1936

2. A retired District Superintendent of Police started thinking of the life contemplative after his 60th birthday. He found meditation a serious affair and approached a disciple for guidance; but the latter advised him to place his difficulties before the Master, which he did today.

Visitor. Bhagavan, whenever I meditate, I feel great heat in the head and, if I persist, my whole body burns. What is the remedy?

Bh. If concentration is made with the brain, sensations of heat and even headache ensue. Concentration has to be made in the heart, which is cool and refreshing. Relax and your meditation will be easy. Keep your mind steady by gently warding off all intruding thoughts, but without strain – soon you will succeed.

* * * *

1st July, 1936

3. A devotee, long before he got attached to this Ashram, used off and on to fall into a sort of trance in which he saw not the Self but a sky-like blank, and told Sri Bhagavan about it.

Bh. He who sees the blank is the Self.

D. Meditation is possible only with control of mind, which can be achieved only through meditation. Is this not a vicious circle?

Bh. They are interdependent: in fact meditation includes mind control, the subtle watchfulness against intruding thoughts. In the beginning efforts for control are greater than for actual meditation, but in due course, meditation wins and becomes effortless.

D. Your Grace is needed for it.

Bh. Practice is necessary, there is Grace.

D. In meditation are there words to be repeated mentally?

Bh. What is meditation but mental repetitions of a concept? It is a mental *japam*, which begins with words and ends in the silence of the Self.

* * * *

A visitor is experiencing great difficulty in meditation when he fights with what he imagines to be his ego. He went to the Master for verification.

V. In my meditation I try to eliminate the wrong 'I', but so far without success.

Bh. How can 'I' eliminate itself? All you have to do is to find its source and abide in it as your real Self. Your efforts can extend thus far, the Beyond will take care of itself.

V. Bhagavan, you always say that the Self is ever present: if I am present then why do I not feel it?

Bh. Do you not now feel that you exist? Your doubt is whether you will ever continue to exist. Why should you have any doubt? A little thinking will convince you that the destructible part of your being, the body, is a mere machine, a tool in the service of the indestructible, the mind, which is the all-in-all, the knower and the master – you yourself. Your doubts and difficulties arise from your thoughts, which perceive the body and mistake it for yourself. Stop the thoughts, which are your enemy (the ego), and the mind will remain as your pure being, the immortal 'I'. That is the best way of eliminating the ego.

* * * *

2nd January, 1937

5. *Visitor.* I am taught that *Mantra Japam* is very potent in practice.

Bh. The Self is the greatest of all *mantras* and goes on automatically and eternally. If you are not aware of this internal *mantra*, you should take to do it consciously as *japam*, which is attended with effort, to ward off all other thoughts. By constant attention to it, you will eventually become aware of the internal *mantra*, which is the state of Realisation and is effortless. Firmness in this awareness will keep you continually and effortlessly in the current, however much you may be engaged on other activities. Listening to Veda chanting and *mantras* has the same result as conscious repetitions of *japam* – its rhythm is the *japam*.

* * * *

5th July, 1936

6. *Visitor.* How to prevent falling asleep in meditation?

Bh. If you try to prevent sleep it will mean thinking in meditation, which must be avoided. But if you slip into sleep while meditating, the meditation will continue even during and after sleep. Yet, being a thought, sleep must be got rid of, for the native state has to be obtained consciously in *jagrat* (the waking state) without the disturbing thoughts. Waking and sleeping are mere pictures the screen of the native, thought-free state. Let them pass unnoticed.

*   *   *   *

27th July, 1942

7. A Chief Engineer of Railways from North India stayed in the Ashram for over a month to have a first hand guidance in meditation.

Eng. I am a beginner in meditation. I pray Bhagavan to guide me. You exhort us to go on enquiring "Who am I?" May I know where it will lead me?

Bh. It is not mere asking; you must go into the meaning of it. Many meditate on certain centres in the body till they merge in them, but sooner or later they will have to enquire into their own nature, which is unavoidable. Then why not straightaway concentrate on yourself till you merge in its source?

E. Yes, for twenty years I have been concentrating on certain *chakras* and have been seeing things and hearing sounds, but I got nowhere nearer the Truth. Now shall I go on asking "Who am I?" as soon as a thought arises in my mind?

Bh. Quite so. So long as you are not disturbed by outside thoughts dwell on its meaning. The aim is to reach the root of the 'I'-sense, through constant suppression of the mental processes...

* * * *

10th November, 1936

V. As far as I can see it, it is impossible to realise the Self until one has completely succeeded in preventing the rushing thoughts. Am I right?

Bh. Not exactly. You do not need to prevent other thoughts. In deep sleep you are entirely free from thoughts, because the 'I'-thought is absent. The moment the 'I'-thought rises on waking, all other thoughts rush out spontaneously. The wisest thing for one to do is therefore to catch hold of this leading thought, the 'I'-thought, and dissect it – who and what it is – giving thereby no chance to other thoughts to distract one. There lies the true value of the *vichara* and its efficacy in mind control.

* * * *

19th February, 1937

9. A visitor asked:

V. What meditation (*dhyana*) is the best?

Bh. The best meditation is that which continues in all the three states. It must be so intense as not to give room even to the thought "I am meditating". As waking and dream states will thus be fully occupied by it, deep sleep may also be deemed to be an undifferentiated *dhyana*.....

V. What is the difference between *sushumna nadi* and *atma nadi*?

Bh. *Sushumna* is the central *nadi* which functions in the practice of yoga, that is, in dynamic *dhyana* and for the attainment of *siddhis* (psychic powers) and which the yogis claim to end in the *sahasrara*, the brain. *Atmanadi*, *Paranadi* or *Amritanadi* is the force current which rises from Heart to the *sahasrara* in the static *dhyana* of the *jnana marga*, which leads to Self-realisation. *Sushumna* has finally to merge in the *Atmanadi* which supports it.

The *nadis* are the nervous system along which consciousness flows from Heart to the whole organism.

* * * *

12th February, 1936

10. Mr. C. caught Sri Bhagavan on his way back from the hill.

C. Sri Aurobindo speaks of two forces which affect the yogic practice; one horizontally and the other vertically. I do not understand it.

Bh. All forces come from the Self, which has no directions. But Sri Aurobindo may be speaking figuratively for the dynamic force which results from concentration in the head centre (or on *kundalini shakti*) and the static which results from the *vichara dhyana* in the Heart.

Later in the evening Mr. C. asked:

C. Bhagavan speaks of *samadhi*, trance. I take it to mean total loss of body consciousness. I am afraid I shall never be able to attain it. I find it hard to send myself to sleep even. Is it necessary before Self-Realisation?

Bh. (laughing) You have to take chloroform in that case. *Samadhi* is itself the state of the Self. What do you understand by total loss of body consciousness? You do

not imagine it to be falling into a sort of catalepsy or deep sleep. In *samadhi* the mind is in *jagrat*, but, being free from thoughts, it enjoys the bliss of *sushupti*, in which the mind is withdrawn. In *samadhi* the mind is so alert that it experiences *Brahman*. If it were not so fully awake, how would it know *Brahman*? In fact it itself becomes *Brahman*. Does trance convey that idea? If not, it is a wrong word for *samadhi*.

C. Do *Karma* yogis and *Bhaktas* also pass through *samadhi*?

Bh. *Samadhi* is merging in the Heart through concentration and mind control. *Karma* and *bhakti* yogis also attain *samadhi* if they practise. In fact most of them attain *mukti* eventually by the *vichara* method.

* * * *

15th July, 1936

11. Mr. C. reads the "Forty Verses" of Sri Bhagavan to himself in the Hall. Verse 30 fascinates him. He reads it aloud and says: "From this verse I understand that the quest must start with the mind and not the Heart, but Bhagavan always speaks of the Heart, perhaps as the last stage in the practice."

Bh. Quite so: it has to begin with the mind turned inward to oppose the rushing thoughts and to understand the location of the 'I'. When the mind eventually sinks in the Heart, undisturbed bliss is overwhelmingly felt. There is then feeling which is not divorced from pure awareness, i.e., head and heart become one and the same.

C. In verse 266 of *Vivekachudamani* Sri Shankaracharya says that *Brahman* can be realised by *Buddhi*, the subtle intellect, which means that the intellect can be of great help; in fact indispensable for Realisation.

Bh. The word "*buddhi*" is rightly translated as the subtle intellect, but here it means the cave of the Heart. Nevertheless the subtle intellect can also realise *Brahman* and is therefore of the utmost importance. (Reads aloud verse 266:)

"In the cave of the *Buddhi* (subtle intellect) there is the *Brahman*, distinct from gross and subtle, the Existence Absolute, Supreme, the One without a second. For one who lives in this cave as *Brahman*, O Beloved, there is no more entrance into a woman's womb."

* * * *

30th July, 1936

12. *Mr. C. Vivekachudamani* speaks of the 'I'-'I' Consciousness as eternally shining in the Heart, but no one is aware of it.

Bh. Yes, all men without exception have it, in whatever state they may be – the waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep, – and whether they are conscious of it or not.

C. In the Talks section of *Sat-Darshana-Bhashya*, the 'I'-'I' is referred to as the Absolute Consciousness, yet Bhagavan once told me that any realisation before *Sahaja Nirvikalpa* is intellectual.

Bh. Yes, the 'I'-'I' Consciousness is the Absolute. Though it comes before *Sahaja*, there is in it as in *Sahaja* itself the subtle intellect; the difference being that in the latter the sense of forms disappears, which is not the case in the former.

C. Bhagavan, you said yesterday that there exists in the human body a hole as small as a pinpoint, from which consciousness always bubbles out to the body. Is it open or shut?

Bh. It is always shut, being the knot of ignorance which ties the body to consciousness. When the mind drops in the temporary *Kevala Nirvikalpa* it opens but shuts again. In *Sahaja* it remains always open.

C. How is it during the experience of 'I'-'I' Consciousness?

Bh. This Consciousness is the key which opens it permanently.

* * * *

13. *Mr. C*. Does the enquiry "Who am I?" lead to any spot in the body?

Bh. Evidently, self-consciousness is in relation to the individual himself and therefore has to be experienced in his being, with a centre in the body as the centre of experience. It resembles the dynamo of a machine, which gives rise to all sorts of electrical works. It not only maintains the life of the body and the activities of all its parts and organs, conscious and unconscious, but also the relation between the physical and the subtler planes, on which the individual functions. Also, like the dynamo, it vibrates and can be felt by the calm mind that pays attention to it. It is known to the yogis and *sadhakas* by the name of *sphurana*, which in *samadhi* scintillates with consciousness.

C. How to reach that Centre, where what you call the Ultimate Consciousness – the 'I'-'I' – arises? Is it by simply thinking "Who am I"?

Bh. Yes, it will take you up. You must do it with a calm mind – mental calmness is essential.

C. How does that consciousness manifest itself when that centre – the Heart – is reached? Will I recognise it?

Bh. Certainly, as pure consciousness, free from all thought. It is pure, unbroken awareness of your Self, rather of Being – there is no mistaking it when pure.

C. Is the vibratory movement of the Centre felt simultaneously with the experience of Pure Consciousness, or before, or after it?

Bh. They are both one and the same. But *sphurana* can be felt in a subtle way even when meditation has sufficiently stabilised and deepened, and the Ultimate Consciousness is very near, or during a sudden great fright or shock, when the mind comes to a standstill. It draws attention to itself, so that the meditator's mind, rendered sensitive by calmness, may become aware of it, gravitate towards it, and finally plunge into it, the Self.

C. Is the I-I Consciousness Self-Realisation?

Bh. It is a prelude to it: when it becomes permanent (*Sahaja*), it is Self-Realisation, Liberation.

XII

SAMADHI, TURIYA, NIRVIKALPA, SAHAJA

The word Nirvikalpa came to connote, particularly in the minds of some Western students of yoga, the profoundest and most awful of mysteries, which none hazards to penetrate without running the risk of total annihilation.

One day in September 1936 I picked up from the Ashram library the *Life of Ramakrishna* by Romain Rolland and sat in the Hall turning its pages. My eyes fell on the Chapter dealing with Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's contact with the Bhairavi and Totapuri and strayed to other parts of the book. It was a fascinating chapter, full of dazzling rhetoric about the Impersonal, the Unmanifest, the Formless, the Unconditioned and the Absolute, of Whom, nevertheless, the author seemed to be extremely terrified. I was struck by its literary beauty, but frankly puzzled by some passages, notably the following:–

On page 58: "They both (Paramahamsa and Bhairavi), instinctively shrank from the blind vision, the last abyss, the Impersonal."

"I have already said that the Formless God lay in wait for him (Paramahamsa) with all His terror and attraction." (p. 59)

Of Nirvikalpa (pp. 81 and 82): "When young Naren importuned him to open to him the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* – the terrible door leading to the gulf of the Absolute – Ramakrishna refused with anger."

(While Vivekananda was meditating) "suddenly he lost consciousness and was absorbed into the Absolute. He had fallen into the depths of the terrible *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*." (p. 307)

Of Muktas (pp. 58 and 59): "For a long time Ramakrishna, not without anguish, had felt prowling round him the formless God and the inhuman, the superhuman indifference of . . . those paramahamsas from those rarefied heights, detached forever from all things, terrible ascetics denuded of body and spirit, despoiled of the heart's last treasure; the diamond of love of the Divine. During the early days of his stay at Dakshineswar he had felt the terrible fascination of these living corpses (*sic!*), and he had wept with terror at the idea that he too might have to come to a similar condition.... Such a man was to be forced to abandon the home of his heart and sink body and soul in the formless and the abstract! Such a train of thought must have been more alien to his nature than it would be to one of our Western scientists."

"But he could not escape. His very terror fascinated him like the eyes of a snake."

How beautiful and how "terribly fascinating like the eyes of a snake" is this description, but how utterly fictitious and misleading it appears to us, we who daily see before our eyes for years and years the Supreme *Mukta*, the Lord of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* – Sri Ramana Maharshi – whose human heart, far from being a "living corpse", coruscates with the most exquisite and the most brilliant "diamond of love of the Divine", the splendour of which, we know, is only due to its "Impersonal and Formless Divinity". One would expect Romain Rolland, a savant and a great lover of Indian philosophy, to resist the temptation of rising to such sublime heights of fatuity when dealing with Truth, which are bound

to scare the unwary. I must confess that, although I had lived at the feet of the Maharshi for over six months, I felt a shiver down my spine when I read these passages. Hence I turned to the Master for relief, and, after reading to him some passages, I asked: "Is *Nirvikalpa* so terrible? Are we then undergoing all these tedious processes of meditation, purification, and discipline only to end in a state of terror, or turn into living corpses?"

Sri Bhagavan sweetly laughed and said: "People have all sorts of notions about *Nirvikalpa*. Why speak of Romain Rolland? If those who have all the Upanishads and Vedantic tradition at their disposal have fantastic notions about *Nirvikalpa,* who can blame a Westerner for similar notions? Some yogis by breathing exercises allow themselves to fall into a cataleptic state far deeper than dreamless sleep, wherein they are aware of nothing, absolutely nothing, and glorify it as *Nirvikalpa*. Some others think that once you dip into *Nirvikalpa* you become an altogether different being. Still others take *Nirvikalpa* to be attainable only through trance, wherein the world consciousness is totally obliterated as in a swoon. All this is due to their viewing it intellectually.

"*Nirvikalpa* is *Chit* – effortless, formless Consciousness. Where does the terror come in, and where is the mystery in being oneself? To some people whose minds have become ripe from a long practice in the past, *Nirvikalpa* comes suddenly as a flood, but to others it comes in the course of their *sadhana*, which slowly wears down the obstructing thoughts and reveals the screen of Pure Awareness 'I'-'I'. Further practice renders the screen permanently exposed. This is Self-realisation, *Mukti*, or *Sahaja Samadhi*, the natural, effortless State.

* * * *

June, 1936

1. Mr. C. wanted to know the exact meaning of *samadhi*.

Bh. *Samadhi* is one's true nature.

C. Is it the same as *Turiya*?

Bh. *Samadhi, Turiya, Nirvikalpa*, all have the same implication, namely awareness of the Self. *Turiya* literally means the Fourth State – the Supreme Consciousness – to be distinguished from the other three – the waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. The Fourth State is eternal, over, or in which the other three, come and go. In *Turiya* there is the awareness that the mind has merged in its source, the Heart, and is quiescent there, although some thoughts still impinge on it and the senses are somewhat active. In *Nirvikalpa* the senses are inactive and thoughts are totally absent; hence the experience of Pure Consciousness is intense in it; so is the bliss. *Turiya* is obtainable in *Savikalpa Samadhi*.

C. What is the difference between *Sahaja* and *Nirvikalpa samadhi*?

Bh. *Sahaja* is also *Nirvikalpa*. You are probably meaning *Kevala Nirvikalpa*, which is temporary, while the *samadhi* lasts. The *Sahaja Nirvikalpa* is permanent and in it lies liberation from rebirths.

There are two *Nirvikalpas*: the internal and the external. In the former the mind completely merges in the inmost Being and is aware of nothing else. This is compared to a lamp protected from wind. But in the latter, although the mind is absorbed in the Self, the sense of world still prevails without a reaction from within, and has the calm vastness of a waveless ocean. In both, the Self is realised in its nakedness and the essence of bliss experienced. When the waveless ocean of the external and the steady

flame of the internal *Nirvikalpa* are realised as identical, the ultimate goal, the *Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi* is said to have been reached. *Nirvikalpa* is effortless, whereas *Savikalpa* is attended with effort.

C. Is the internal *Nirvikalpa* absolutely necessary before the attainment of *Sahaja*?

Bh. Abiding permanently in any of these *samadhis*, either *Savikalpa* or *Nirvikalpa* is *Sahaja*. What is body-consciousness? It is the insentient body plus consciousness. Both these must lie in another consciousness which is absolute and unaffected, and ever-abiding, with or without the body-consciousness. What does it then matter whether the body-consciousness is lost or retained, provided one is holding on to that Pure Consciousness? Total absence of body consciousness has the advantage of making the *samadhi* more intense, although it makes no difference in the knowledge of the Supreme.

* * * *

July, 1936

2. *Mr. C*. May I have a clear idea, Bhagavan, of the difference between *Savikalpa* and *Nirvikalpa*?

Bh. Holding on to the Supreme State is *samadhi*. When it is with effort due to mental disturbances, it is *Savikalpa*, when these disturbances are absent, it is *Nirvikalpa*. Remaining permanently in the primal state without effort is *Sahaja*. Like *Nirvikalpa*, there is an internal as well as an external *Savikalpa*, depending on whether the disturbing thoughts are from outside or from inside.

C. Should all *vasanas* (mental habits) be completely overcome before Self-Realisation takes place, or may some remain for Self-Realisation to destroy?

Bh. *Vasanas* which do not obstruct Self-Realisation remain. In Yoga Vasishtha two classes of *vasanas* are distinguished: those of enjoyment and those of bondage. The former remain even after *Mukti* is attained, but the latter are destroyed by it. Attachment is the cause of binding *vasanas*, but enjoyment without attachment does not bind and continues even in *Sahaja*.

* * * *

13th March, 1936

3. Mr. C. and Major C. differed among themselves about whether or not the meditator can be affected by physical disturbance during *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. They referred the matter to the Master.

Bh. Both of you are right. The one refers to *Kevala* and the other to *Sahaja Samadhi*. In both cases the mind is immersed in the bliss of the Self. In the former physical movements may cause disturbance to the meditator, because the mind has not completely died out, but is still alive and can, as after deep sleep, at any moment be active again. It is compared to a bucket, which, although completely submerged under water, can be pulled out by the other end of the rope which is tied to the pulley. Whereas in *Sahaja*, the mind, having sunk completely into the Self, like the bucket which has got drowned with its rope in the depth of the well, there remains nothing in it to be disturbed or pulled back to the world. One's activities then resemble that of the child who sucks its mother's milk in sleep, and is hardly aware of the feeding.

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25th February, 1949

4. Two young men, Sri Chakravarty and Sri Jivrajani, who have been performing *sadhana* in this Ashram since about a year, today had an animated discussion among themselves about *Kevala* and *Sahaja Nirvikalpa*, which attracted partisans on both sides. Finally they submitted their cases to the Maharshi. The younger, Jivrajani, led:

Jiv. Is the experience of *Kevala Nirvikalpa* the same as that of *Sahaja*, although one comes down from it to the relative world?

Bh. There is neither coming down nor going up – he who goes up and down is not real. In *Kevala Nirvikalpa* there is the mental bucket still in existence under the water, which can be pulled out at any moment. *Sahaja* is like the river that has linked up with the ocean from which there is no return. Why do you ask all these questions? Go on practising till you have the experience yourself.

Next day Sri Chakravarty, hearing Sri Bhagavan talking to a *sadhaka* about the above question, came forward and said:

Ch. I wish to make our point clear, Bhagavan. Is it possible for a person, who, once had the experience of *satchidananda* in meditation, to identify himself again with the body when out of meditation?

Bh. Where is the body? Is the body apart from the Self? If it is, then the world also will be apart from it, which is absurd, for you would not be aware of it – awareness being the Self. A *sadhaka* begins by taking himself as the body, but when he gets at the Self, he will realise himself to be Pure Intelligence – even the body will then appear as that intelligence, as the variously shaped jewellery are nought but gold. . . (pensively) Yes, it is possible for a

sadhaka who has experienced the Self to continue identifying himself with the body when out of meditation, but he gradually loses the identification in the course of his practice. In the floodlight of the Self the darkness of illusion dissipates for ever.

XIII

NIRVANA

5th May, 1937

1. A visitor asked the meaning of *Nirvana*.

Bh. *Nirvana* is that state wherein the sense of separateness does not exist and where the ego has sunk in its source, the Heart.

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20th April, 1937

2. Mr. C. had read a book called *Nirvana*, written by a prominent Theosophist, in which the author claimed to have experienced *Nirvana* after going to sleep, in which he "saw the Masters" as vivid centres of light in the ocean of Light which is *Nirvana*, which Mr. C. could not reconcile with Sri Bhagavan's teaching. So he asked the Master about it.

Bh. *Nirvana* is the Perfect State. There is neither seeing, hearing, nor experiencing in it. There is nothing but the pure "I am" awareness. The *Nirvana* you describe from your reading is sheer imagination.... Well, this and other similar movements are good, inasmuch as they make man unselfish and prepare him for the highest Truth. Service also leads to the same goal – Self-realisation – if it is selfless.

C. But after how long and why should one who is ready for the Absolute knowledge go in for the relative?

Bh. Everything happens in its own time. One who is ready for the Absolute will be made somehow to hear of it and then start the practice. He will immediately recognise the value of *Atmavidya* and will follow it up with determination.

XIV

HEART, LIBERATION

Heart, in Vedantic parlance, is synonymous with the Self, *Chit*, or pure Mind. Being absolute, it is ever changeless, formless, single and inactive. But as the word connotes Centre, it seems to imply a connection with a phenomenon, of which it is the source, or point of contact. It is the point at which the formless Spirit appears to take a form, i.e. to manifest itself in, and as, the world of forms.

Although the world with its myriads of forms, colours sounds and qualities does not in reality exist, or exists to the Self-realised man as identical with his own Self, as waves, or thoughts, in his own consciousness, to the man who is struggling to release himself from the grip of the senses, it appears too true to be lightly rejected as mere thoughts. Such a man needs guidance on his own level and from his own standpoint. Hence the Scriptures use various names for the one and the same Reality – Self, Spirit, Mind, Heart, Soul, God, Pure Consciousness, Supreme Brahman, Great Void, Silent Witness, Knower of the field, and many more – denoting the various facets it presents to the seeker in the phenomenal world and the various attempts at explaining them.

Heart implies, therefore, the point of union between the Self and the world (or body), the switch-board of the fusion of light and darkness. It is thus the seat of the *granthi*, the knot of ignorance which creates the illusion that the world is other than Mind, that is, as a projection in an objective space independently of the perceiving mind.

The illusion arises out of the fact of life, which flows from Heart to the body, and which creates in it the impression that it is a body, an entity (*jiva*) entirely separate and different from all other entities. The consciousness which fills the body as life, being pure existence (*sat*) by nature, instinctively knows itself as 'I', but seeing nothing with the senses (through which it is accustomed to know the world) on which it can confer the title of 'I' but the body, it fails to apprehend itself as the unperceivable consciousness and falls victim to the primal illusion that the body is itself. Having thus lost sight of its true nature by false identification, it gets entangled deeper and deeper in the *tamasic* and *rajasic* needs and craving of the material body and thus sets turning for itself the grinding wheel of life and death, birth and rebirth, pleasure and pain, knowledge and ignorance, etc., till the bitter end, when the longing for home and rest stirs it to carry out a search for them through *tapas* and *sadhana* and the guiding grace of the Divine Master.

This fall of the individual consciousness from its sublime State is described in Srimad Bhagavata as "the *Atman*, fascinated by the sports of Its *maya* in the body, thinks 'I' and 'mine'."

Sri Bhagavan shows the way Home in the simplest words: "Enquire into the nature of that consciousness which knows itself as 'I' and it will inevitably lead you to its source, the Heart, where you will unmistakably perceive the distinction between the insentient body and the mind. The latter will then appear in its utter purity as the ever-present, self-supporting intelligence, which creates, pervades its creation, as well as remains beyond it, unaffected and uncontaminated. Also, *finding* the Heart will be experienced as *being* the Heart. When this experience becomes permanent through constant

practice, the much-desired Self-Realisation or *Mukti* is said at long last to have been achieved – the 'I-am-the-body' illusion has broken for ever."

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25th April, 1937

1. Sri B. V. Narasimha Swami is in the Ashram to prepare the third edition of his English translation of Sri Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saram* with his own commentary. He requests the Master to give him some more details about Heart and its movements. Sri Bhagavan said:

Bh. Heart is the seat of *Jnanam* as well as of the *granthi* (the knot of ignorance). It is represented in the physical body by a hole smaller than the smallest pin-point, which is always shut. When the mind drops down in *Kevala Nirvikalpa*, it opens but shuts again after it. When *sahaja* is attained it opens for good.

The *granthi* is the knot which ties the insentient body to the consciousness which functions in it; that is why when it is loosened temporarily in *Kevala Nirvikalpa* there is no body consciousness.

I used to feel the vibrations of the Heart, which resemble those of a dynamo, even in school. When I developed *rigor mortis* many years ago in Tiruvannamalai, every object and sensation disappeared, except these vibrations. It was as if a dark screen was drawn before my eyes and shut the world completely from me, but of course I was all along conscious of the Self, with a vague feeling that someone was crying near me. This state continued till just before I regained physical consciousness, when I felt something rush from the Heart to the left chest and re-established life in the body.

A sudden fear, sudden joy, or a shock makes the Heart vibrate very forcefully, so that it can be felt by anyone who pays attention to it. Otherwise it is felt only in *Samadhi*.

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23rd October, 1936

2. A student who is preparing his thesis for the Ph.D. degree asked:

S. God is said to be immanent, how do you justify your confining Him to the heart?

Bh. God is said to reside in the Heart in the same way as you are said to reside in your body. Yet Heart is not a place. Some place must be named as the dwelling of God for those who take their bodies for themselves and who comprehend only relative knowledge. The fact is neither God nor we occupy any space. We are bodiless and spaceless in deep sleep, yet in the waking state we appear to be the opposite. *Atman* or *Paramatman* is that from which the body is born, in which it lives, and into which it finally resolves.

LOOK WITHIN IS THE MESSAGE.

XV

THE JNANI – THE AWAKENED

The *Jnani*, also known as the Awakened, the Enlightened, the Self-Realised is he, who, although like every other person, uses a body, has broken the illusion that the body is himself. After lives of strenuous search, he found the Heart and realised himself to be none other than the Supreme *Sadasiva Brahman*, the Absolute Consciousness, without qualities or forms. Evolution, Karma, Rebirth, have ceased to have any meaning to him. Although he has a body, he sees it as in a dream, or as he sees any other inanimate object around him, outside, yet not outside his being. The world neither attracts nor repels him, nor has any power to destroy him. He is the pure Void of Awareness, which sees yet does not see; acts yet does not act. He is neither bound nor free, neither God nor man, nor in fact anything – he is only himself.

His state baffles imagination. One wonders how the Cosmic, Pure Mind, wraps itself with a frail human body, which appears to eat and sleep, act, become diseased, tired and hungry. It is a mystery of mysteries. Hence Sri Bhagavan used to be assailed by questions about the *Jnani's* mental state. Although the questions refer to him, the questioners took care not to put them in a personal form. They never addressed him as "you" or "yours", but always as "Bhagavan", or the "*Jnani's*". The following answers will give a remote idea of his sublime state.

HIS PAINS:

C. Does he who is in *Sahaja Samadhi* feel any physical pain, say, of a sting or a cut?

Bh. All pains, even physical, are in the mind. Everybody feels the pain of a cut or a sting, but the *Jnani*, whose mind is sunk in bliss, feels it as in a dream. His resembles the case of the two lovers in the story who were tortured together but did not feel pain because their minds were in ecstasy, gazing at each other's face.

HIS SIDDHIS (psychic powers):

C. Do *Jnanis* who, before *Jnana*, had *siddhis*, preserve them after merging with the Absolute?

Bh. Yes, *siddhis* are acquired by *prarabdha karma* and are not a hindrance in *Mukti*. They are a hindrance on the way to *Mukti*.

* * * *

A North Indian visitor asks whether the *Jnani* automatically acquires *siddhis* or whether he has to strive for them separately if he desires them.

Bh. Who is the *Jnani*? If he is the body you see, then his *siddhis* will be shown to other bodies. But if he is pure awareness, from where will he get the *siddhis* and to whom will he show them?

Both the *Jnani* and the *Bhakta* (devotee) do not desire or work for *siddhis*; the former because he sees himself the All, and the latter because he sees his *Ishta Devata* – his favourite God – the All; even his own action is done by this God; he has no will of his own at all to impel action on his own initiative. Yet *siddhis* follow them both like their shadows.

What greater *siddhi* is there than that of the Sage, who by merely sitting on his couch, attracts thousands of people from the four corners of the earth, hundreds of whom change their old modes of life and some even attain Godhood?

People see many things which are far more miraculous than the so-called *siddhis*, yet do not wonder at them, simply because they occur every day. They do not see miracles in the man who comes almost from nothing and, when born, he is not bigger than this electric bulb, and then he becomes a giant wrestler, or a world-famed artist, orator, politician or Sage, but they are wonder-struck if a corpse is made to speak.

* * * *

HIS DREAMS:

Mr. C. asks if the *Jnani* dreams.

Bh. Yes, he does dream, but he knows it to be a dream, in the same way as he knows the waking state to be a dream. You may call them dream No. 1 and dream No. 2. The *Jnani* being established in the 4th state – *Turiya*, the Supreme Reality – he detachedly witnesses the three other states – waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep – as pictures superimposed on it.

* * * *

HIS DESIRES:

C. Does a *Jnani* have *sankalpas* (desires)?

Bh. The main qualities of the ordinary mind are *tamas* and *rajas* (sloth and excitement); hence it is full of egoistic desires and weaknesses. But the *Jnani's* mind is *shudda-sattva* (pure harmony) and formless, functioning in the

subtle *vignanamayakosha* (the sheath of knowledge), through which he keeps contact with the world. His desires are therefore also *sattvic*.

*   *   *   *

A visitor asks Sri Maharshi whether desire does not destroy *Jnana*.

Bh. The desires of a *Jnani* are external to him like other objects and cannot taint him.

V. The Puranas say that *Jnanis* warred against *Jnanis*. How is that?

Bh. Yes, Sri Krishna fought against Bhishma. The *Jnanis* view all as Brahman, yet they fight.

*   *   *   *

15th June, 1938

HIS VIDEHAMUKTI (after death):

The "Vision" (of Anandashram, Kanhangad) for June contains an article by Sri Bhagavan. It is a Preface to his translation into Tamil of *Vivekachudamani* of Sri Shankaracharya which has been translated by Mr. S. Krishna into English for the "Vision". Mr. C. reads it to himself in the Hall. Struck by the following statement, he reads it aloud to Sri Bhagavan: "The liberated man is free indeed to act as he pleases, and when he leaves the mortal coil, he attains absolution, but returns not to this birth which is actually death."

C. This statement gives the impression that although the *Jnani* takes no birth again on this plane, he may continue to work on subtler planes, if he so chooses. Is there any desire left in him to choose?

Bh. No, that was not my intention.

C. Further, an Indian philosopher, in one of his books, interpreting Shankara, says that there is no such thing as *videhamukti*, for after his death, the *Mukta* takes a body of light in which he remains till the whole humanity becomes liberated.

Bh. That cannot be Shankara's views (he opens *Vivekachudamani* and points to verse 566 which reads that after the dissolution of the physical sheath the liberated man becomes like "water poured into water and oil into oil"). It is a state wherein there is neither bondage nor liberation. Taking another body means throwing a veil, however subtle, upon Reality, which is bondage. Liberation is absolute and irrevocable.

(*Note:* In his *Atma-Bodha*, stanza 53, Shankara says the same thing as in verse 566 of *Vivekachudamani* – S.S.C.)

PART III

DIARY

INTRODUCTORY

The years 1948-50 saw the evening shadows gathering and closing on the mortal coil of the Master. Advancing age brought a series of mishaps to it – a fall, a nervous hiccup lasting many days, a clinging rheumatism, and lastly a malignant tumour, which inch by inch ate up the flesh of his left arm, poisoned his blood and, finally, rang down the curtain on a life, purer than which there has never been nor will ever be.

Of these two critical years I felt a strong urge to keep a diary to record the Maharshi's movements, talks, and the condition of his health, for no other object than to perpetuate for myself his blessed memory. But after his *Mahanirvana* I felt the same urge to share it with his devotees in order to bring back to them those hallowed scenes and events which marked the last days of his earthly life. Some of the talks I incorporated in Part II of this book.

Since that never-to-be-forgotten night of April 14, 1950, when the Maharshi for the last time laid down his body and completely merged in the peace everlasting, from which there is no return, many of his close disciples have also shed their bodies and followed him. The others who are still with us, and who in the beginning took some time to recover from the painful void which his physical absence had created in their lives, continue to feel his holy presence particularly in their meditation, which proves the scriptural pledge that the spiritual link that nature forges between Master and disciple, time, the all-destroyer, has no power to break, till the disciple succeeds in scaling the same height as the Master and attains union with Him.

16th June, 1948

An article about Sri Maharshi has appeared in the *Free Press*, Madras. Professor Subbaramayyah of Nellore reads it aloud, so that all present may hear. Sri Maharshi intently follows in another copy, so intently that one would think he was correcting an important manuscript. He occasionally passes humorous remarks and broadly smiles. In the end he directs his attendant to cut and paste it in the special file.

17th June

8-30 a.m. Jagadish Sastri, a Samskrit scholar and Maharshi's devotee, arrives from Madras. Sri Bhagavan enters into an earnest conversation with him. I hear him counting on his finger tips "Tanana, tana, tana . . . ." from which I infer they are discussing metre of Samskrit verse. Sri Bhagavan goes on speaking and gesticulating uninterruptedly for about 20 minutes, obviously explaining some passages. Then Sri Sastri mentions Vidyaranya as saying that *Chit* can be Shiva and Shakti at one and the same time, as well as separately. Sri Bhagavan quotes from *Arunachala Purana* that in essence both are one and the same *Chit*, and reads from this book with deep emotion. He goes into ecstasy on Gautama's praise of Shiva. Though smiles light his face, tears pour out of his eyes, of which none has a suspicion till he wipes them and blows his nose.

It is now 9-55: Sri Maharshi suddenly realises that he is late for his usual small walk by 10 minutes. "Oh, so late!" he remarks and takes to oiling his knees and hip joints to ease their rheumatic stiffness before rising. Pointing to his body he says smilingly, "This machine cannot move without oiling."

The famous cow Lakshmi, the pet of the Ashram, who has been ailing since some time, today passed away at about noon. Having known of her approaching death, Sri Maharshi

went to the *Goshala* (the cow house) at about 9-45 a.m., sat on the ground, put her head in his lap and stroked it gently, repeating with infinite tenderness "Lakshmima, Ma, Ma, Ma Lakshmi" to comfort her in her last hour.

At 6-30 p.m., Lakshmi's body was brought in a cart to the north of the dining hall for burial. All the Ashramites gathered and in the midst of them sat Sri Maharshi on a chair. While the Brahmins were giving her the ceremonial bath, as they do to a human body, with dozens of pots of water, Sri Bhagavan softly told her life-story to those standing by his side – how she had been brought to the Ashram in 1924 as a calf six months old and how she lived longer than the usual twenty-year span. He praised her sweet, affectionate nature and her intelligence, adding: "She might have been a *sadhaka* in the past, which made her deserve to be brought to the Ashram to attain *Mukti*."

Bath over, the Brahmins smeared her whole body with turmeric, and marked her forehead with sacramental vermilion (*kumkum*). They decked her with fresh jasmin garlands and put a new red silk scarf round her neck, then burnt camphor and incense near her. She was then wheeled a few yards away for burial, to witness which Sri Bhagavan had with difficulty to climb a few steps.

I have never seen Sri Maharshi so weak as this evening. After the burial of Lakshmi the people began to disperse, and he too was attempting to descend the three steps near the dispensary with the help of the wall. But he started vacillating and shaking. Although the steps were broad and of moderate height he was not able to negotiate them alone. Two attendants held him at the hips and helped him down them. It was with great trepidation that we watched him through the process, and, when we saw him reach the flat ground safely, we heaved

a sigh of relief. He generally does not like anyone to interfere with him, or offer him a helping hand. He hardly accepts the help of his own attendants, and often tells them to mind their own business. We can only look on at his difficulties and feel sad at heart that we can do nothing for him.

21st June, 1948

Yesterday Sri Maharshi composed a quatrain on Lakshmi in Tamil, giving the date and the astrological sign of her death, referring to her as a "liberated soul", for which he used the Samskrit word "*Vimukti*" to make it quite clear that it was not merely release from the body that he meant, but final emancipation. This morning he translated his quatrain into Telugu and showed it to the Telugu devotee, Professor Subbaramayyah, over which both of them joked and laughed, because Sri Bhagavan had used Tamil metre for a Telugu poem, as he had done in his own *Ekatma-Panchakam* – the five verses on the Oneness of Atman. Prof. Subbaramayyah highly praised Sri Bhagavan's Telugu versification.

In the evening Maharshi translated the same quatrain from the original Tamil into Malayalam.

23rd June

4-30 p.m. Mrs. F. Taleyarkhan hands Maharshi two letters. One is from Dr. T. N. Krishnaswamy, Madras, in which he writes that his own cow has given birth to a she-calf, which he has named Pushpam four hours after Lakshmi's death, but that when later he heard of the latter, he turned the name to Lakshmi Pushpam. Bhagavan reads the letter aloud and gesticulates smilingly. The other letter is from Sri C. Rajagopalachariar, Governor-General of India, in which he accepts Mrs. Taleyarkhan's invitation to open the temple

which she has built over the *Pathala Lingam*, where Sri Maharshi spent the first six months of his stay at Tiruvannamalai in 1896.

24th June

9 a.m. The Maharshi is reading and talking in a cheerful mood. The white peacock strolls in, pecks a few of the grains placed for him by the attendant and walks off confidently to a short distance. A crow drops in and sets to pecking hastily at the grains. Bhagavan draws our attention to the scene. The peacock stands aghast at the scandalous encroachment of the crow. Horrified, he spreads his feathers round his back, cranes his neck and looks fiercely at the crow, as if ready to spring. Now he steps forward with an extremely bellicose gait. We all thought that a terrific battle was going to be waged before our eyes. To our astonishment the crow proves brazen-faced, as he remains unmoved. He watches the peacock mockingly with one eye and with the other continues to peck greedily – obviously he knows his man.

Still we are apprehensive of the fate of the crow. But alas, the peacock, instead of advancing, suddenly falls two hurried steps back and stops meditatively – planning, we thought, a violent *blitzkrieg*. We waited, but when at last the assault did come, it was only a single resolute step forward followed by a dead halt. By now all the grains have peacefully reposed into the crow's belly who then hops to the water in the cement basin nearby, drinks his fill, wipes his beak on the hard ground, bows in deep salute to the proud peacock and flies contentedly away. The Maharshi and all of us had a hearty laugh at the cowardice of the peacock, who now cools down, lowers his feathers and struts away with a feeble show of bravery. We were thoroughly amused.

Sri Bhagavan has all along been very fond of watching the behaviour of animals and has thus become an expert in anticipating their reactions in given circumstances and in knowing how to deal with them to help them. His sympathy and consideration for them seem to exceed even those for humans. Yet he sometimes appears gently severe with them, which puzzles some devotees, as it did once puzzle me in the following incident, which was entered in my diary under the date of 28th March, 1943, and which I feel to the point to record hereunder:

"On the 24th. instant at 10-30 a.m. the Master was dozing. A female squirrel leapt on his couch and bit his thumb* which he quickly pulled back and stroked, remarking, 'I'll not feed her.' Other squirrels crowded on his couch and for half an hour he continued to feed them with cashew nuts, one nut at a time to each. Then he turned to us and, pointing to one of them, said: 'This She-squirrel has been trying to fool me, thinking I do not recognise her, and so shall feed her. Once she comes from this side, once from the other, once from under the couch and once from above it. But I recognise her very well. She shall not have anything,' and laughed. At that the following vague thought crossed my mind: 'Where is the Christ's injunction that if a man slaps you on one cheek offer him the other?'

"Today a squirrel jumped from the window to the couch. The Master looked at it intently. He gave it a nut, then another and addressed it: 'Now go. Have you come to bite me again?' I quickly guessed that that was the guilty squirrel of four days ago and wondered how Sri Bhagavan recognised it and relented. Nevertheless, I asked him if my guess was right, and he confirmed it. After a while the same squirrel came back for more nuts. Usually the Master continues to feed the animals

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* Obviously to draw the Master's attention.

till of their own accord they cease to come. But to this one he refused to give again and, seeing it persisting, he lifted his fan in threat, which made it disappear at once. Then he sat with pensive look and a faint smile on his face. After a while he turned in my direction, broadened his smile and softly spoke in Tamil in his usual telegraphic brevity to my neighbour: 'Even animals understand a rebuke and, if it is repeated a sufficient number of times, they learn to behave. Some of them are more sensible than some others....' This was immediately translated to me. I laughed, frankly admitted the vague thought I had had on the first day, and added that although I had never doubted Sri Bhagavan's wisdom, that thought needed the explanation, which made the Master nod approvingly."

4 p.m. Maharshi is handed a book, which he turns over and over excitedly, exclaiming "Rai, rai, rai!" It is a Tamil translation of the original *Sarvajnanottara*, from which he had fifteen years earlier translated 52 verses into Tamil without knowing of the existence of a translation of the whole work made more than ten years earlier. This is a great revelation to him. He hurriedly turns to the verses he has translated and compares them with the corresponding ones of the older translation. The difference he finds to be very small, due to the difference in their view points – his being pure Advaita and the other's Shaiva Siddhanta. He goes on reading with great joy.

28th June, 1948

8-30 a.m. The morning is very cool and fresh after last night's shower. Incense is burning in profusion near Maharshi's couch. The peace, like the perfumes of the incense and the flowers, is all-pervading. The Tamil paper comes. Maharshi opens it and sees a caricature of Sri C. Rajagopalachariar, our Governor-General, wearing the naval uniform and cap of Lord

Mountbatten, his predecessor. Everything, except the face, is Mountbatten's. Bhagavan utters a loud chuckle and turns to us to explain the joke. We enjoyed more his innocent joy than the artist's sketch. In the end Maharshi remarks: "This resembles the work of *maya* – the Real is hidden in the unreal sheaths, just as Rajaji is hidden in Mountbatten's clothes."

* * * *

Mr. C. sat near the Master's couch and read aloud the following verse from *Vivekachudamani*:–

"The blissful sheath (*Anandamayakosha*) has its fullest play in deep sleep, whilst in the dream and waking states it has only a partial manifestation, occasioned by the experience of agreeable objects."

Sri Bhagavan commented:–

"In *sushupti* (deep sleep) one enjoys a whole ocean of bliss like a king; whereas in the other two states the range of bliss is as wide as are the classes of men, from the king down to the penniless."

Mr. C. Sushupti is often characterised as the state of ignorance.

Bh. No, it is the pure State. There is full awareness in it and total ignorance in the waking state. It is said to be *ajnana* (ignorance) only in relation to the false *jnana* (knowledge) prevalent in *jagrat*. Really speaking *jagrat* is *ajnana* and *sushupti prajnana* (wisdom). If *sushupti* is not the real state where does the intense peace come from to the sleeper? It is everybody's experience that nothing in *jagrat* can compare with the bliss and well-being derived from deep sleep, when the mind and the senses are absent. What does it all mean? It means that bliss comes only from inside ourselves and that it is most intense when we are free from

thoughts and perceptions, which create the world and the body, that is, when we are in our pure Be-ing, which is Brahman, the Self. In other words, the Be-ing alone is bliss and the mental superimpositions are ignorance and, therefore, the cause of misery. That is why *samadhi* is also described as *sushupti* in *jagrat*, the blissful pure being which prevails in deep sleep is experienced in *jagrat*, when the mind and the senses are fully alert but inactive.

29th June

8-30 a.m. Devotional songs are heard from Trichy on the radio by the Maharshi's side. He reads a Tamil paper, apparently unconcerned. But those who know him guess that his whole attention is centred on the music, till he dozes off to the tune of the flute and the *tabla*.

I understand he hardly sleeps in the night. Every now and then he eludes the attendants and goes out alone. Hence three of them nowadays keep a constant watch in the night lest he should go out by himself and fall without anyone nearby to help him.

1st July, 1948

10 a.m. Maharshi returns from his short walk and hardly sits when a very small boy carrying two small mangoes comes and, instead of placing them on the special offerings-table, he shoves them in Bhagavan's hands. Maharshi laughs, keeps one and returns the other to the child, who immediately puts it to his mouth and bites. Maharshi laughs louder and says: "Not like that." The boy returns munching to his mother.

25th July

Sunday, 9 a.m. Maharshi, while writing, listens to the music programme on the radio. He writes, as usual, resting the

pad on his raised right knee. Often he stops writing and beats time to the music. The comic part in Tamil follows. The dialogue must be extremely droll to cause him to try hard to stifle his laughter. At times he is so overwhelmed by it that he stops writing and chuckles aloud, looking around for response.

26th July

9.30 a.m. Maharshi is seriously occupied on a manuscript which he is correcting with Mr. Visvanathan, who sits down to carry out his instructions. Bhagavan is doing hard thinking. I have never before seen him so involved in thoughts. His eyes are wide open and the eye-balls roll from side to side as thoughts roll in his mind, till he finds the right construction of a sentence or the idea he needs, when he turns to Mr. V. and dictates to him. It is now 10 a.m. 15 minutes too late for going out. The attendant, who has been hesitating since some minutes, draws his attention to it. He looks at the timepiece and cries: "O, la, la! it is 10 o'clock! Why didn't you tell me? Look at that! 10 o'clock and they didn't tell me!...." He quickly takes the bottle of ointment, lubricates his joints and rises in haste.

27th July

10.15 a.m. Maharshi calls the old devotees Professor Venkataramiah and Mr. Visvanathan, and makes them sit down. Mr. V. reads *Atma-Bodha* of Sri Shankaracharya, one verse in Samskrit and one in Tamil. Maharshi and Prof. V. follow in copies in their hands. The Tamil verses are Maharshi's translation of it, on which he has been occupied since about a week. There has already been a Tamil translation in existence, but it did not please the Maharshi.

2nd August

9-30 a.m. Sri Maharshi is absorbed in writing. Mrs. Mazumdar, a Bengali devotee, comes in with a tray of fruits and a bottle wrapped in tissue paper in her hand; she places them on the offerings-table, prostrates and goes to her place. From the corner of his eye Sri Bhagavan espies the bottle and, without raising his head, calls the attendant to fetch it, which the attendant does. He coolly takes it and carefully reads the label, once, twice; even the smallest type he strains his eyes to read. Then he returns the bottle as indifferently as a child does to an object in which it is not interested. "*Eh, yenneh*" (take it away, it is oil), he tells the attendant and resumes his writing. His power of observation is amazing and his show of curiosity in the smallest object, without the slightest desire for it or for anything under the sun, is still more amazing, though delightfully naive.

17th August, 1948

10-15 a.m. Mr. Rappold, an American devotee opens his eyes from meditation in which he seems to have been deeply sunk and raises his voice:

Rappold. Bhagavan, what should a devotee do at the time of death?

Bhagavan. A devotee never dies, rather he is already dead. (Then he stops and waits for a competent translator. Devaraja Mudaliar enters. Bhagavan completes the answer.) What should a devotee do at the time of death? What can he do? Whatever a man thinks in his life-time, so he does in his last moment – the worldly man thinks of his worldly affairs and the devotee of devotion and spiritual matters. But a *Jnani* having no thoughts of any

kind, remains the same. His thoughts, having died long ago, his body also died with them. Therefore for him there is no such thing as death.

Again, people fear death because they fear to lose their possessions. When they go to sleep they do not have such fear at all. Although sleep resembles death in leaving all possessions behind, it causes no fear in their hearts because of the knowledge that the next morning they will enter into their possessions once again. The *Jnani*, having no sense of possession, is entirely free from the fear of death. He remains the same after death as before it.

28th August

From early morning people started flocking from the town to the Ashram, on the rumour that the Maharshi had passed away. Many of them came with tears flowing from their eyes, but became happy on seeing him in good health.

In the evening Sri Bhagavan tells everybody and jokes about it: "A man," he said, "in the morning gave me his namaskar, and then told me of the rumour of my death. I asked him to see for himself" and chuckled. Today, being the Tamil anniversary of his arrival at Tiruvannamalai (1896), some enemies of the Ashram played this practical joke. "God, forgive them for they know not what they do," I thought to myself.

5th September

9-40 a.m. A visitor hands the Maharshi a very beautiful walking stick, which seems to be made of the best ebony. Maharshi takes it, turns it on all sides, and carefully examines every part of it, then stretches it back to the giver, who signifies that it is an offering for Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan replies, "What will I do with it?" and, turning to the disciples, he smilingly says:

"In olden days I used to make and give away sticks. Nowadays I am being presented with them. What will I do with them? If I take this stick, it will remain here unused till someone will one day carry it off. Then the presenter will feel sorry. Will it not then be better for him to take it back right now and, seeing it, he will always remember me?" The devotees laughed, and the visitor's depression turned to elation, which made him exclaim: "Your grace has overwhelmed me; I'll cherish it all my life, as it has been hallowed by Bhagavan's touch."

22nd February, 1949

About a fortnight ago, the Ashram Doctor, Dr. Shankar Rao, assisted by Dr. Srinivasa Rao, removed a very small growth from the left elbow of the Maharshi, since when it has remained bandaged; but today the bandage has been removed and it is left exposed – it is presumed to have healed.

2nd March, 1949

5-15 p.m. The very aged Ashram *stapati*, the master sculptor, who has been absent since a long time, probably due to old age ailments, came in tottering, carrying fruit offerings. As the Maharshi saw him approach, his eyes opened widely and shone with extreme delight, as if he had seen a long-missed friend, which the old *stapati* observed. *Stapati* was so touched by these signs of Bhagavan's affection that his whole body shook. He wanted to give expression to his love and adoration for Sri Bhagavan, but he did not know how to do it. Finally he yielded to his impulse and, contravening the Ashram rule which forbade the touch of the Master's body, fell flat on Maharshi's feet and legs and bathed them with tears. Two attendants gently helped him to rise and gave him a seat very near Bhagavan's couch. After he calmed down Sri Maharshi enquired after his health,

the cause of his absence and all his other news. It was a sight to see Sri Bhagavan so deeply moved in meeting again an old Ashram worker, who had taken a leading part in the architectural designs of his mother's temple according to the rules prescribed by the Hindu Shastras.

18th March

Kumbha-Abhishekam, the consecration ceremony according to Hindu rites of the temple built over the remains of Maharshi's mother, known as Mathrubhuteswara, which started on the 14th., has ended today. Humanity, masses of it, started pouring into the Ashram since the 13th. from all over India especially from the neighbouring villages.

The Yagna ceremony began on the fourteenth at 8-30 p.m., when Sri Maharshi sat on an armchair and not very far from his left foot, on the floor, sat Sri Shankaracharya of Puri, who had arrived that morning for the purpose. All round him sat a large number of devotees, visitors and a huge crowd. The brief ceremony was over by 9 p.m., when Maharshi was taken to open the new big Hall attached to the temple. Being too weak to turn the colossal key of the door, the young *stapati* turned it for him. He was taken directly to the inner temple and helped over the short flight of steps and made to touch the stone *Sri Chakra*, which stands immediately behind the *lingam*, as the symbol of the Creative Power latent in the Formless Spirit (*Chit*). He was then taken out and made to sit for the first time on the stone couch in the new temple Hall, which was covered with red velvet cushions. People began to prostrate before him half a dozen at a time. After a while he was taken out and lifted into the *Yagasala*, opposite the Hall, where a brief ceremony was performed. By then Maharshi showed signs of exhaustion and had therefore to be taken immediately to bed for the night's rest at about 10 p.m.

On the 15th. morning the crowd swelled to over 10,000. Sri Maharshi's couch was placed on the North verandah of the new Hall. Musicians with flutes, violins and *tablas* played by his side. Yagna ceremony went on at top strength in all the three *yagasalas* erected for the purpose. Flames leapt from dozens of specially-constructed fire pits, fed by pure ghee and a special kind of sticks. Flame and smoke rose sky-high to the loud chanting of more than a hundred priests. But all this was drowned by thousands of voices from the crowd. The sight was impressive. The most silent man in this huge din was Sri Bhagavan himself, who was fully indrawn and totally unconcerned on the surface. But his disciples knew his joy at the fulfilment of a ten-year old desire to leave for posterity a spiritual heritage of priceless value, a desire not of his own, but of a man, the Sarvadhikari, who thought himself an instrument of Sri Bhagavan's divine will, conveyed to him not by word of mouth, but by mere thought. The value of this temple consists in its treasuring in its bosom the body of the mother of one of the greatest Saints and Sages that have ever lived, also in its being built stone by stone under the very eyes of the Maharshi and in its most sacred portions being hallowed by his personal visits and touch. The dream has now taken shape. Ten years of tireless efforts have come to an end.

The 15th. and the 16th. saw the crowd increasing by the hour. Such was the influx of the visitors from the mofussil that by the 16th. evening, when the brass vessels – the *kumbhas* – about six in number, were taken to the top of the *gopurams* (towers), the total was estimated to be over 15,000.

The grand climax came on the 17th. morning. From the Morvi Guest House to the north wall of the Ashram, there was one compact mass of human heads. Although it was an orderly crowd, movements were impeded, despite all

the efforts of the volunteers to keep a way open. The Chief Minister of Madras State, Sri Omandur Ramaswamy Reddiar, was expected. All the highest officials of the District and many magnates from Madras came by cars. At 11 a.m. Sri Maharshi was taken out to give the special signal to the priests on the *gopurams* (temple towers) to start the *abhishekam*. He gently raised his hand and the bathing ceremony on the top of the temple started. Then he was taken to the inner temple and made to place his hand on the *lingam* just then installed in front of *Sri Chakra*. The *lingam* was soldered to its stone platform with twenty tolas of gold (8 ounces) contributed by devotees. Then he returned to the new Hall and sat on the stone couch over which stretched a white silk canopy embroidered with silver presented by the Maharaja of Darampur. Then the Sarvadhikari, Sri Niranjanananda Swami, was called and made to sit opposite the Maharshi, when Mrs. Taleyarkhan read a short speech in English in his praise, for his earnestness, his sincerity and his unremitting efforts in building up the Ashram and the temple, and garlanded him. The speech was immediately translated into Tamil, sentence by sentence, which pleased him considerably.

The day ended with music and songs given by aristocratic young ladies from Madras, followed by temple music, which continued till about midnight, when Sri Maharshi went to bed; thus closing the *Kumbha Abhishekam* series of ceremonies and functions for the time.

27th March, 1949

The lump which was removed from Maharshi's left elbow last month and which was thought to be healing satisfactorily, subsequently started to grow again, so that the eminent surgeon, Dr. Raghavachari, came today from Madras with surgical

instruments to remove it. Sri Maharshi entered the Ashram's clinic at 9-40 a.m. The operation lasted 20 minutes and ended at about 10-30. The lump, which has been temporarily diagnosed as neuroma, is seated on the ulnar nerve with two fibres in it. A section is sent for microscopic examination. The surgeon, we are told, performed the operation skilfully by cutting deep and removing the last cell of the growth, without injuring the ulnar nerve, which controls the forearm and fingers. He does not expect a recurrence of the growth. The whole afternoon Maharshi remained somnolent, due to the local anaesthetic injection given to him before the operation. No one can tell if he is feeling any pain.

18th April, 1949

Sri Bhagavan's wound from the operation of the 27th March has not yet completely healed: it is healing very slowly. Our anxiety is not yet at an end. A week ago came the analyst's report which diagnosed it as sarcoma. It has since a few days been mildly bleeding. But Sri Bhagavan's moods are as bright as ever and the lustre in his eyes is not in the least dimmed.

This morning a small boy about ten years old by my side spoke to me in Telugu. Seeing that he was not understood, he walked slowly to the Maharshi's couch, leaned on it and talked hurriedly to the Master. Maharshi was all smiles and tenderness to him, then he turned to us and explained that the child, having seen him lubricating his joints a little while ago, offered to do it himself, because in his opinion Sri Bhagavan was too old to rub them effectively. Then turning to the child he told him: "If you are going to do the rubbing for me, then you must also do the eating for me," and called the attendant to give him bananas. But before the fruit was brought the little boy disappeared.

20th April

Sri Maharshi's health is causing grave anxiety to the three doctors, who have been in constant attendance on him, as well as to the devotees. A lady devotee wept much and went to him in tears and asked him to give her his disease and be cured of it, saying: "Bhagavan, you who are curing others must cure yourself and spare your life for us, your devotees." Once, twice he waved her off, and, seeing her great concern finally replied with great tenderness: "Why are you so much attached to this body? Let it go."

At about 5 p.m. the local Police officials and Mrs. T. approached Sri Maharshi and explained to him all the arrangements they had made for the opening ceremony of the temple erected by this lady over the *Pathala Lingam*. They wanted to know the year in which the first photograph of his was taken at Tiruvannamalai and a few other details. Sri Maharshi replied: "It was taken four years after my coming *i.e.*, in 1900. Originally that *lingam* was on the surface of the ground, like all other *samadhis*, before the big temple was built, but in course of time the ground-level rose. When much later the thousand-pillar *mantapam* was built about four or five feet higher than the ordinary level, the *lingam* sunk still lower, so much so that it earned for itself the name *patala* (underground) *lingam*. In those days I was alone with the elephant, which was always tied in the *mantapam*." They prostrated and left. But Sri Bhagavan continued his reminiscences: "I stayed about six months in the big temple (in which *Patala lingam* occupies a small corner), September 1896 to March 1897 – in all the places in it. Urchins used to run after me and, when I hid myself in *Patala lingam*, they used to pelt me with stones and potsherds from outside, none

of which, however, could reach me, as I used to sit in the south-east corner. The urchins never dared to come in because of the extreme darkness in the pit, and the broken steps which could not be seen from above."

24th April

Radium has been applied to Sri Maharshi's wound for the first time today. Everyone is depressed, but Sri Bhagavan himself is as jovial as ever, though visibly weaker. At 3 p.m. Mr. Kalyana Sundaram, a devotee and an ex-Ashram worker, brings him a postcard from his brother in which the latter enquires after Maharshi's health and asks whether the Master had that morning undergone the third operation, to which Maharshi replied: "No, it is not an operation, but radium application. The lump is growing from inside like a *lingam*, but it is giving me no trouble. I am feeling no pain nor any inconvenience. The doctors have taken some slough from it and have sent it to America to see if they can use radium or not, but no answer has so far come. There are two kinds of tumours – malignant and non-malignant. Whatever it may be, it will take time to heal. Why worry?" After a few minutes attendant Venkata Ratnam goes to enquire on his own initiative and returns to inform Bhagavan that no slough has been sent to America, at which Maharshi exclaims "Is that so?" and waves his hand to indicate his indifference. We all smiled at his ingenuousness.

27th April, 1949

Last night at 6-30 p.m. Sri Ramiah arrived with Dr. Nambiar and Dr. T. N. K. All are old devotees. Sri Ramiah approached the sofa and cautiously enquired: "What is this .... a boil .... on Bhagavan's elbow?" Sri Maharshi replied,

"Yes, I told them not to cut it, but the doctors insisted that it should be removed. Let it be, it will be all right," and continued to talk cheerfully to the three of them. The two doctors advised him not to move the arm and disturb the radium, nor to touch it with the other hand. He waved them off with his right hand, as if to say "Why all this fuss?"

At 5-20 p.m. today, as soon as Maharshi returned from his evening walk and sat, he switched on the table fan by his side and started reading some notes. Attendant Satyananda started fanning his back. Sri Maharshi asked him to stop it, which he immediately did. A little later, attendant Venkata Ratnam, who had just arrived, quietly slipped behind the Master, who by now got absorbed in reading and fanned him. Soon Sri Bhagavan noticed it and turned squarely on Venkata:

"Oho! how great is your *bhakti*! Look how stealthily you came behind me and fanned me – Aha! If your *bhakti* is so great, why don't you go and fan all these devotees? *Romba visesham . . . romba sari*! Oho!" (very important, excellent). Thus he taunted and railed at him. Then he turned this way and that to complain against V. R. for full ten minutes. After about an hour on seeing T. P. Ramachandra, the lawyer, sitting by the side of the attendants, he repeated the whole scene to him: "Look at the great devotion of this man (V. R.)! Although this morning I had protested against anyone fanning me, in the evening he stealthily went behind my back while I was engaged in reading and fanned me. I told him if he had so much devotion for me, he should also fan all these my devotees. It is said that service to the devotees is as meritorious as service to the guru . . . (turning to V. R.) yes, go and do it. He thinks his *tapas* to be so powerful as to compel me to bend to his will . . . *romba nalladu. Aha! romba sari*." (very good, excellent).

1st May

Last night at about nine o'clock three doctors came from Madras and took X-ray photos of Maharshi's arm. This morning two more joined them. They decided to remove the radium and watch the effect. It has for the present arrested the growth to a great extent. About a week ago they were unanimous in their recommendation to amputate the arm, but Dr. Raghavachari, the surgeon, advised the use of radium first. Today, however, he found amputation unavoidable and at 4-45 p.m. he saw Sri Maharshi alone in the bathroom and told him: "I want to be frank with Bhagavan, so that he may know the real position from the medical point of view and direct us. There are two ways of finishing this case: the first is scooping out the flesh right down to the bone, which will render that hand practically unusable. The other is surer and safer, namely, amputation of the whole left arm from the shoulder. It is now for Bhagavan to decide." Maharshi paused for a few seconds and replied: "As I let you look after your body, you will please let me look after mine," which made one or two devotees standing within earshot go aside and sob, for they felt that that decision of his amounted to a death sentence. Maharshi then walked back to the hall with supreme indifference.

2nd May, 1949

The temple bell went on tolling till noon with beating of drums, loud prayers and *puja* – officially closing the *kumbha abhishekam* ceremony which started on the 14th March.

At 5-15 p.m. Maharshi and Devaraja Mudaliar talk about a Tamil book, which has been translated into English. Bhagavan tells a story from it:

"A traveller passed by a brook and sat by its side for rest. He saw a leaf drop from a tree. Half of it fell in the water

> and the other half on the land. The former turned into a fish and the latter into a bird, and the two started pulling each other. While the traveller was puzzling over this phenomenon, a demon swooped on him and lifted him up to his abode, where there were 999 other men, who had been similarly kidnapped. They were men who had fallen from the path of virtue and piety. They had been very well treated and sumptuously fed by the demon, their host, till the newcomer brought their number to one thousand, when the demon prepared them all for a sacrifice to his god. The men started vehemently abusing the newcomer for being the cause of their imminent death. Dire dread made them direct their minds towards God, Lord Subramanyam, who then appeared, killed the demon and saved them."

On the 30th night the doctors gave Maharshi blood-transfusion – about twenty ounces, which continued from 10-30 p.m. till 2 a.m. He refused to take another bottle of it, because it would interfere with his usual programme of going out at 5-30 a.m.

8th May

This morning Dr. Lakshmipathi, the well-known medical practitioner in both Allopathy and Ayurveda, arrived from Madras. Before seeing the wound he questioned Maharshi on the five *koshas* and the three bodies spoken of in the Hindu Shastras. Bhagavan as usual gave him an Advaitic answer, which kept him thinking hard. In the evening he saw the wound and declared it "not as bad as I thought it to be", and directed Dr. Shankar Rao to apply on it a certain herb, which he named and which, he declared, would complete the healing process.

Today the tumour seems to have completely disappeared, due to the application of radium, and the wound is nearly closed, although its base is still hard. Maharshi looks also much better and healthier. The radium needle was removed on the 5th.

9th May

10-30 a.m. A small bag of *kadakka* (myrobalans) came by post. Seeing it, the Maharshi said: "Oh, *kadakka*, but I am using it daily," and showed some by his side. The Ayurved school teacher, Sri Ramachandra Rao of Bangalore got up and said: "If we grind some of these nuts and apply the paste on Bhagavan's wound it will surely heal." Everybody was puzzled at the simplicity of the treatment and the magnitude of its effect. Bhagavan remarked with a twinkle in his eye: "O yes, he is a doctor and knows." All of us laughed, but loudest of all laughed the Ayurved himself.

We are told that the action of the radium will continue till the 5th June, that Sri Bhagavan's tumour is a peculiar neuro-sarcoma and not cancer. Cancer is constitutional, so that if cut out of one place it may appear in another, whereas sarcoma is a local growth, which appears and re-appears in the same place. If it appears on a limb and that limb is amputated, there is an end of it. But in this case, Sri Maharshi is definitely against amputation.

14th May, 1949

His Excellency the Governor-General of India, Sri C. Rajagopalachariar, arrived last night in a special saloon with His Excellency the Governor of Madras, the Maharaja of Bhavnagar, and Her Excellency the Maharani of Bhavnagar with their aides-de-camps and retinue to open the temple over the *Pathala Lingam*. Mrs. Taleyarkhan, the hostess,

received His Excellency exactly at 8 o'clock this morning in the big Arunachaleswara temple in the town. After introducing to him Mr. J. H. Tarapore, as the donor and architect of the temple, his family and a few others, she delivered her welcoming speech in English, to which he replied in Tamil. Then he opened the temple at about 8-45, after which he returned to his saloon.

Their Excellencies the Maharaja and Maharani of Bhavnagar drove to the Ashram and sat on two chairs opposite the Maharshi in a straight line with his feet. His Excellency said in English to the Master that it had long been his own and his wife's wish to have his darshan and sit on the floor rather than on chairs like now. Sri Maharshi remained silently gazing in space, as he usually does when not engaged in any work. Their hostess spoke to them in Gujerati, their mother tongue, and after ten minutes, they rose, bowed to the Master and left to worship in the Ashram temple and see the Ashram round. At noon Their Excellencies and party returned to Madras after lunching at the railway station with the Governor-General.

1st June

A small ceremony was performed this morning which made the new temple-hall the permanent *Darshan* Hall, in which, from today on, Sri Bhagavan will meet devotees and visitors. After the ceremony a big block of granite stone was brought and placed at a point outside, which the Maharshi could see from his couch across the south door facing him. It is to be his statue. It was plastered with turmeric and vermilion and camphor light was waved before it for good luck by the chief sculptor (*stapati*), who made the first chip on it with his hammer and chisel.

Last evening a very old disciple of the Maharshi, now an old man, prostrated before him. I noticed a gauze bandage round his left elbow and thought to myself that it looked as if he were imitating Sri Bhagavan. Hardly I finished this thought when Sri Maharshi observing him laughingly remarked: "Hoho! you are competing with me. You have the wound in the same place as myself." Everybody laughed, except the old man himself, whose sense of humour seemed to have deserted him at the moment.

15th June

The dressing has been removed. There is a prominent lump surrounded by a red ring, which does not augur well. Benzoin alone is painted over it.

25th June, 1949

Last night at about nine o'clock, when Maharshi's left hand was being massaged, he asked that the upper arm, where the wound is located, should be also massaged, because it felt itchy. The attendant answered that the doctors had ordered him not to massage it lest it should bleed. "Is that so?" Maharshi remarked and set himself to massage it, rather briskly, with the right hand, which immediately drew blood.

This morning at about 8 o'clock Sri Bhagavan started talking: "Yesterday Prof. Subbaramayyah spoke to me of curing diseases by will-power, implying that I should cure my arm by my own will. Did I ask the tumour to come, so that I may tell it to go? It came of its own accord, what then have I or my will got to do with it?" and so on. He seems to be determined to leave his disease entirely to itself without a vestige of a wish to be well again, or an effort to think what should best be done for it. He worries over it even less than he would if it were a mere lump of mud on the wall behind him.

5th July

On the 3rd, the doctors agreed that no more radium could be applied, as the last application had burnt the skin and left the flesh bare. In any case Sri Bhagavan will not allow radium application any more than he will allow amputation. The Ashram authorities had therefore to call in the herbalist, who had, years ago, treated the fracture of his collar bone. Today he came and applied some herb paste with the help of the attending doctors.

Their Highnesses of Mandi arrived with their son on the 3rd. Today Rani Saheba timorously approached Sri Maharshi with prayer to him to cure himself. In her gentle, soft voice she threatened: "I will not leave this place till Bhagavan promises me to cure himself." He merely waved his right hand, dismissing the proposal as of the least consequence.

6th July

Muruganar Swami, a very old and distinguished disciple, a Tamil scholar and poet, handed Maharshi a Tamil poem composed by himself, praying Sri Bhagavan to live up to hundred years in perfect health. A devotee read it aloud. Hearing it, Sri Maharshi said: "There is a story of a Vaishnava Saint, in whose centenary celebration his disciples prayed that he should live for another hundred years. You want me to live up to hundred, so that you may, at the end of it, pray for another hundred!"

15th July

Bhagavan's health seems to be improving. Since a few days, pieces have been falling from the tumour, the last portion of which dropped yesterday. Today the herbalist applied a highly irritating herb on the wound "to suck out all the morbid matter"

from its base, which is said to be now flat. Internal medicines have also been given since some days. By evening the irritation must have reached considerable proportions as to cause shivering and perhaps feverishness, judging from Maharshi's listlessness, somnolence and drugged look, although as usual he never complained of pain or any inconvenience.

But when at 4-45 he prepared to go out, he showed signs of extreme weakness – his whole body shook, and the legs were utterly unable to stand or bear his weight, even for one step. We all thought he was going to collapse in a heap before our eyes, but somehow he steadied himself and, with the attendant's support, managed to go to the bathroom, where the old application was substituted by a new soothing herb. On his return the weakness and the forcible dragging of the legs were more pronounced, so that by the time he crossed the frightfully high stone threshold into the hall and looked at us, signs of death were on his face. The strain on the heart from this exertion, and probably from the drug, was tremendous, as we judged from his loud panting, even after having dropped exhausted on his couch. Every one of the three hundred men and women devotees present turned pale and remained transfixed to the ground, till the attendants made signs to them to sit down.

Even in a solemn moment like that, when life hung by the flimsiest thread, Sri Maharshi's solicitude for the guests and devotees occupied the first place in his mind; for he hardly rested than he called attendant Satyananda, who had supported his hip-joints in his journey to and from the bathroom, and whispered something to him, which was later explained as his declared desire that the dining routine should not be altered, which implied that he would not have his dinner alone in the *darshan* hall, as he had suspected such a plan was afoot, but as

usual in the dining hall with others. The dining hall is situated at a great distance from the *darshan* hall and its southern entrance, by which Maharshi usually enters, is preceded by seven steep steps. To go there for dinner would compel Sri Bhagavan not only to make the distance on foot, but also cross the terrible threshold of the hall, as well as climb all the seven steps, which is far more than his state of health would permit. A few of his important disciples went to him one after another and begged of him to consent to dine alone in the *darshan* hall where he sat, but he refused. Our hearts were in our mouths when the dinner bell rang at 7-30 p.m. and we saw him preparing to get down and walk. Walk he did, and with firm steps too, but in order to make him avoid the southern entrance, he was requested to enter by the northern one, which had only two easy steps, but he turned down the request by moving to the southern door and climbing the steep steps. He tottered for a while and, seeing the attendants ready to hold him, he stopped, turned to them and said: "If you leave me alone, I would walk far steadier," and entered the dining hall unaided.

20th July, 1949

Last night a lady-doctor saw the Maharshi's wound and privately told some of us that there was nothing to congratulate ourselves for, as the tumour was still present and that what had fallen off was only the cauliflower excrescences which had been necrosed by the caustic herb applications.

31st July

Faith in the herbalist has completely waned. The tumour has increased in size and Bhagavan's health has greatly deteriorated with a daily rise of temperature in the evening and loss of appetite. On the 25th, Dr. Guruswami, the famous diagnostic physician

of Madras came and saw the wound. He expressed great dissatisfaction at the way the case had been handled, at the radium treatment, and at the application of caustic herbs. He prescribed injections, the first of which was given on the 28th night.

This morning eight doctors were counted in the Ashram. Some more arrived at noon for a big medical consultation. Bhagavan is cheerful and jovial as ever, although his health is much worse than yesterday. Seeing Krishnamurthi, the radiologist, sitting in the first row next to a great devotee, Balaram Reddiar, he exclaimed in surprise: "Haha! what a coincidence! He (the radiologist) always reminds me of Balaram – same complexion, same hair, same features – and now they are sitting side by side. Balarama is the elder brother of Sri Krishna, and this Balarama is older than this Krishnamurti," and laughed heartily.

For some days the Brahmin priests of the Ashram have been daily performing a special *puja* and *suryanamaskar* (sun worship) for Maharshi's recovery. Today Maharshi remarked: "What is the use of this? The Spirit which is in the sun is here and everywhere."

At about 3 p.m. all the doctors assembled for consultation. Sri Maharshi in his usual compassion wanted the two devotee-homeopaths also to be called. They were called just to satisfy the letter of his wish, as no doctor except one took any notice of them. In the night one of them was taken to task for having administered a single homeopathic dose to Sri Maharshi earlier in the afternoon.

2nd August, 1949

Because of evening fever, Maharshi has been given four penicillin injections aggregating one million units, which stopped it since two days.

Yesterday orders were issued that in view of his extreme weakness, the maximum rest and comfort should be given to Sri Maharshi. Disciples were therefore requested to attend only one hour in the morning and one in the evening for the usual *parayanam* (Veda recital), so that after 9-30 a.m. the doors were closed, which Maharshi did not notice. But when at 3-30 p.m. he saw the doors still closed and came to learn of the new orders, he rebelled and commanded that they should be immediately opened. He argued: "Many people come from great distances for *darshan* and cannot wait till evening; they must not be disappointed. Secondly, if the doors remain closed, people will suspect something serious and the whole town will flock. Thirdly, if you pin the devotees to only these hours, the time may not suit some of them, who will be greatly inconvenienced . . ." etc. The doors remained open, but the devotees were privately requested not to cause him discomfort by their presence, which most of them obeyed. Today being Tuesday as well as a Hindu festival, a constant stream of villagers continued to flow in the hall to prostrate and go out for *pradakshina* round the sacred Arunachala Hill.

Today also the hall remained open as usual, but the devotees attended only the two specific hours, with the exception of the very few who were immune to persuasion. The bell of the temple remained silent this evening.

7th August

Although tomorrow will be full-moon and therefore Maharshi's shaving-day, yesterday he was given the shave. From yesterday *parayanam* also stopped and with it the admission of the disciples into the hall. Visitors alone could enter, prostrate and go out immediately. Disciples could prostrate outside the hall.

Last night surgeon Raghavachari arrived; before him arrived all the necessary instruments, blood plasma, etc., for today's operation. At 7 a.m. today, Dr. Guruswami also arrived by car. Sri Maharshi walked to the dispensary very early in the morning to be prepared for operation. He was given an injection in the left shoulder of a new anaesthetic of the "novocaine" family and also one of "omnopon," an alkaloid of opium, to keep him half-asleep and to deaden the pain of the operation. The operation is to be bloodless through the use of a diathermic knife, which is not actually a knife, but a blunted needle controlled by electricity. The needle merely moves over the flesh required to be cut and the electric current does the actual cutting, simultaneously with the singeing of the blood vessels, so as to cause immediate clotting, with the result that neither bleeding nor infection takes place.

At about 8-15 a.m. the operation proper started. The surgeon took great care not to leave a single morbid cell in the wound. He had thus to cut very deep without interfering with the ulnar nerve. The operation lasted about two and a half hours, then the arm was put in plaster of Paris, tightly bandaged. A little after the beginning of the operation Sri Maharshi had laboured breathing, which frightened the surgeon, who stopped a while and started giving blood-transfusion. The two bottles of plasma brought in advance did not prove sufficient, so that fresh blood was taken from the radiologist and others, some of which was mixed with the plasma and some given as it is. In all he was given 250 c.c. plasma and 650 c.c. of fresh blood.

From 8 a.m. devotees started pouring from South India and from the town, so that by 10-30, constables and special volunteers had to control the crowd. All approaches to the dispensary were closed and sentries were posted at them.

Numerous doctors crowded the dispensary, or rushed in and out of it on one mission or other till about 10.45, when Sri Niranjanananda Swami came out with Dr. Guruswami and told the anxious crowd that "the operation is highly successful, but Bhagavan must have full rest today and must not be approached. Devotees may kindly disperse now; tomorrow they may have his *darshan* if the doctors will permit it."

The crowd gradually melted, but started gathering again at about 5 p.m. Having received the news that a large number of devotees were anxious to see how he was, Sri Maharshi insisted that he should walk to the *darshan* hall, which dismayed the doctors, but with difficulty he eventually agreed to a compromise to be placed on the verandah of the dispensary and there give *darshan*. The *bhaktas* arranged themselves in a queue and filed past him with only a bow – prostration was not allowed for lack of time and space.

9th August, 1949

Yesterday Sri Maharshi felt very uncomfortable with the plaster of Paris sticking to his flesh. He felt a great itching sensation in the wound, but the plaster was too thick to make an impression when massaged. At 11-30 a.m. the plaster was removed and at 12-45 afternoon, the Maharshi suddenly rose and went down the dispensary steps towards the *darshan* hall. The attending doctors were flabbergasted, rushed to him with folded hands and tried their best to take him back to his bed in the dispensary, at least up to 4-45, but it was of no avail. He tottered to the new bathroom, and thence to the *darshan* hall. At 5-15 people were allowed to enter from the east door, prostrate and walk straight out by the south door.

This morning although Maharshi's temperature was normal and he was feeling better, no one was allowed to enter

the hall even for mere prostration. This had to be made outside the south door, which remained open with a sliding collapsible door drawn across it, through which devotees could see him facing them, without being able to enter.

The offerings-table, which usually stands near the couch, was today placed outside the south door, so that flower and fruit offerings may be deposited on it. Penicillin injections are being administered to prevent sepsis.

14th August

At 5 p.m. Dr. P. Rama Rao, the Madras radiologist, came and stuck radium needles in a wax and moulded it over Maharshi's wound and bandaged the arm with plaster of Paris, so that even if the hand moved, the radium mould would not be disturbed. He applied it with mathematical accuracy – the larger and more powerful needles in the centre, the smaller and weaker ones towards both ends of the mould. The radium needles are encased in gold containers. The first and second most potent needles are deadly and, although encased in hard gold, they are handled only with a pair of tongs. The age of each needle is estimated to be between 200 and 400 years.

The healing process has not yet started, although seven days have already passed since the operation day, due, it is said, to the Maharshi's low vitality.

The doors of the hall continue to be closed, prostrations are being done outside the south door.

15th August, 1949

In honour of the Independence Day, attendant Krishnaswami today opened the doors of the hall and let people in for prostration only on his own responsibility.

18th August

At 5-40 a.m. Dr. Shankar Rao, the Ashram doctor removed the radium mould and found healthy granulations in the epithelium, which is the sign of healing. Confidence of complete cure is entertained if no growth will reappear within a month.

The doors of the hall remain open only for prostrations since the 15th. Sri Maharshi's food is given to him on a table placed level with his couch in the *darshan* hall. He continues to think of the devotees who may be missing him at meal time. Yesterday he enquired: "When am I to have my food in the dining hall with the others?"

About 3-30 p.m. Dr. Rama Rao came from Madras with his family, saw the wound and said that no prognosis could be made before three weeks had elapsed.

24th August

This evening the *parayanam* – stopped since a few weeks – is resumed and will continue henceforward, Sri Bhagavan's health permitting, morning and evening as before, during which devotees are allowed to sit in the hall. For the first time since the 6th August the big bell in the Ashram temple rang this evening during *puja*.

Sri Maharshi looks well and walks fast enough, but to my eyes he looks much thinner than before the last operation. Sometimes he jokes with the attendants. The pain which he has been feeling during and before the radium application is subsiding, relieved to some extent by the hot water bottles applied.

Since some days a baby leopard is brought to the Ashram in the evening and taken to Maharshi, who pats and looks

intently at it. The Sarvadhikari is very fond of it and expresses his love by slapping it hard on the back, and then rewards it with three cups of milk, which it avidly laps like a cat.

27th August

Maharshi's wound, which has been clean and healing for some days, started sloughing again. At 4-30 p.m. Dr. Raghavachari and his assistants closed the hall for about one and a half hours and removed a small quantity of the slough, which they took with them for examination in Madras.

Sri Maharshi's emaciation in the neck and legs is daily increasing.

29th August, 1949

Sri Maharshi composed a verse in Tamil over which an English lady-devotee grew very jubilant and looked forward to reading it in English translation, taking it to be a hymn in praise of the Lord of Creation. It turned out to be a laxative recipe, which Maharshi had written with his own hand in ten long lines. Bhagavan is bubbling with joy over it and is showing it to everybody like a schoolboy who has written his first poem.

11th September

Today is the last of the 48 days of the *Suryanamaskar* prayer, recommended by Dr. Guruswami for the recovery of Sri Maharshi's health. Every day it has been read in the Ashram's *Veda-Patasala* by special Brahmins. But today, being the closing day, it has been recited in the hall immediately after the usual daily prayer and has taken two hours to finish – 7-40 to 9-40 a.m. It consists of 132 hymns taken from the *Yajur Veda*. We immensely enjoyed listening to it, it has sweet rhythm and has

been read with fervour in well synchronising voices by seven Brahmin youths led by their teacher.

Sri Bhagavan looks better and the wound is said to be healing, though very slowly, which raised our hopes for a complete recovery; probably the uplifting tunes of the *Yajur Veda* recitation had something to do with this optimism.

24th September

The old Mudaliar lady – "Patti" – who has been daily serving Maharshi with rice cooked in her own house and at her own expense for forty years, passed away at about midnight. As soon as the news of her death reached Sri Maharshi, he started talking about her and went on the whole day telling her story from 1908 – one year after Echammal came, – when she first came to him in Virupaksha Cave, upwards, and how she stuck to him all these years with unflagging devotion and wholehearted service. He enquired about the place of her burial and, when told that it would be in the Hindu general burial-ground, he said that it should be in the place where she died. His order had to be obeyed, and a pit was dug within that compound which is not far from the Ashram proper. Her body was made to sit cross-legged in Yoga *asana*, as it is customarily done to the bodies of sannyasis, then garlanded with flowers and sprinkled with sacred ash and camphor and finally buried for final rest.

15th October

Maharshi is suffering great pain from stiffness and rheumatism in the left knee, for which a Brahmin devotee has given him homeopathic doses of Magnesia Phos internally and fomentation. He is walking with difficulty. In order to give him easy access to the bathroom at night and to spare him the crossing of the high threshold of the hall which has

become a veritable nightmare, his bed from tonight on will be placed in the tiny room (adjoining the bathroom), which has so far been used for storing the linen of his sofa, and other objects personally used by him.

20th October

Yusuf Meherali, the Chairman of the Socialist Party of India, who has spent here thirteen days for recuperation and rest in the proximity of the Maharshi, left today.

5th November, 1949

Today being full moon, Sri Maharshi has had his shave as usual. There has been no *parayanam* in the hall in the evening, but a big *puja* in the temple, because of an important Hindu festival. After the holy *lingam* was plastered with cooked rice and *arati* about to be performed, Sri Bhagavan was made to sit on a chair placed over the stone lotus in the centre of the hall, directly facing the Holy of Holies. The devotees squatted on both sides of him on the floor. During *arati* Sri Bhagavan was completely indrawn, as he almost always is on religious occasions. *Arati* over, he was helped back to his couch, a few feet away.

4th December

This is Deepam Day – the full moon of the month of *Kartikai* – most holy to Hindus in the South. The holy beacon will be lighted tonight on the top of Arunachala, the Hill of Fire, which symbolises the light of the Spirit in all hearts and in the universe. Arunachala, another name of Shiva, enthralled Sri Maharshi fifty-three years ago, when he was a mere youth in his teens and made him substance of His substance and indistinguishable from His Essence. Arunachala, a mere hill

of stones, remained for him the blissful Universal Self and the Living Guru, both in one. Every year, since the foundation of this Ashram, this day has been celebrated in it with illumination, prayers, reading of the Vedas, and devotional songs, followed by distribution of several kinds of *prasadam*.

Tonight Sri Maharshi sat in the north verandah of the *darshan* hall from where he could directly see the top of the hill. All around him hundreds of devotees squatted, some on the cement verandah, but the majority on the sandy ground. Not far from his sofa stood the large brass vessel, three-quarters filled with pure ghee, surmounted by a thick wick, ready to be lighted at the right moment as the Ashram beacon, making a sacred triangle with those of the hill and of the big Arunachaleswara temple.

But this jubilation is not without a sting. Will the health of Sri Maharshi favour us with another *Deepam day* and be with us in the flesh, or is this to be the last? As we see him seated fresh and bright as ever, gazing expectantly at the top of his beloved Arunachala, we cannot help being optimistic of his recovery. The body which is stricken by a most malignant disease, hacked on many occasions by the surgeon's knife, burnt by radium, and drugged by all sorts of powerful drugs, bears no trace of the agonising ordeal in the brilliance of its eyes or in the joyful expressions of its face. What miracles are being performed in it! What are its mysteries!

Ten minutes before sunset, the time for lighting the deepam, Sri Niranjanananda Swami came on the scene. With bare breast and fresh from his bath and the Shaiva marks prominently drawn on his arms, chest and forehead, he stood by the side of the ghee basin and received the ghee offerings brought mostly by the lady-devotees and poured them into the ghee vessel. A minute or two before six, the flame suddenly

leapt up on the top of the hill and our Ashram flame immediately followed it, accompanied by the reading of "*na karmana*", after which the series of chanting, singing, etc. began.

Maharshi's health is fairly normal, but he needs to be lifted up when he slides down on his sofa, and supported when he stands or begins to walk. This is due not only to muscular weakness, but also to the stiffness of his knee and hip joints, as well as to his inability to use the left arm. He can use only the left fingers, if no movement of the elbow is involved.

About ten days ago he paid a visit to the store-room opposite the back-door of the kitchen, to see for himself its renovated verandah. When he looked up and saw over the door of the store-room a design of Arunachala Hill with the beacon lighted over it in cement, he grew reminiscent and told the attendants that it was a copy of the original design which he had drawn on paper more than twelve years earlier. All the workers were happy at his visit, because he was able to walk about sixty yards both ways.

13th December, 1944

Surgeon Raghavachari came yesterday at about 2 p.m., saw the tumour and ordered his staff to make all the necessary arrangements for operation which he fixed for Sunday, the 18th. Sri Maharshi asked him what would happen if the tumour were to be left to itself, and he answered that it would grow exceedingly large and would create all sorts of constitutional disturbances and complications, adding. "Now that it is no bigger than a small lime it can be easily removed."

Sri Maharshi nowadays dozes a lot and the rheumatism of his knees has grown so bad that almost all the time two attendants massage his legs and thighs. His food is not nourishing and he often refuses the extra dishes and fruits.

Monday, 19th December

Yesterday the Ashram dispensary was made ready for the operation which was to take place yesterday, but was postponed to today; and this morning at about 5-30 Sri Maharshi walked slowly into it. At about 6-15 (before *Rahu kalam*) the operation started and continued till about 7-30, but the doctors came out only at about 9-30, after having given him blood-transfusion of 400 c.c., mostly from fresh blood.

21st December

Sri Maharshi is still in the dispensary and devotees are given only half an hour to file past him morning and evening, just time enough to bow and move off. He looked very pallid and languid. I understand that last night anodyne and sleeping drafts were administered to him to make him comfortable. But no precise information is being given and no bulletin issued. It is reported that the surgeon had warned the authorities that all that could be done for the Maharshi had been done by his system of medicine, and that they were now free to do for him, the Maharshi, what they thought best, which greatly disturbed the devotees and set each of them to think of his or her pet doctor and specialist to take up the case, but none dared to suggest it.

Thus a cloud of pessimism and despair hang heavily over the hearts of the devotees. Many ladies, seeing Sri Bhagavan's depleted health, return from the *darshan* with tears streaming down their cheeks. Everyone asks the question: "What is to be done now?"

23rd December

The anxiety over Maharshi's health has considerably increased, and the pent-up feeling of the devotees has run so high that yesterday it found expression in the cry "Homeopathy,

homeopathy!" from many of them. The clamourers marched to the office, and, after a long conference, sent a telegram at dead of night to the veteran homeopath in South India, Sri T. S. Iyer, requesting him to take up the case.

At 7 p.m. attendant Rangaswami with sleepy eyes and tired look told me that Sri Maharshi's pain was greater and his vitality much lower now than after the last operation. He added: "Four people at a time now have to keep awake the whole night to lift him down to his feet from his couch when he wants to go to the bathroom, as he is not used to a bedpan. Bhagavan hardly sleeps or eats, for as soon as he eats his rice, which is his staple diet, he immediately brings it out. All he eats is some fruit juice, an apple and a little pepper-water. We almost do not sleep at all . . . What to do? The wound is now very big, covering nearly the whole upper arm."

24th December, 1949

T. S. Iyer, the homeopath, arrived early morning and talked with the Maharshi for one full hour in the dispensary. Sri Bhagavan was very gracious to him and answered all his questions, a thing he rarely does: he always respects persons older than himself. T. S. Iyer started the treatment with Calendula lotion as external application, and tomorrow he will give internal medicines.

26th December

Dr. Raghavachari came today, saw the Maharshi, and had a talk with the homeopath, after which he left back for Madras. From yesterday Maharshi started eating rice without discomfort. Evening and morning *darshan* continues, now increased to one hour each time.

2nd January, 1950

At about 9 o'clock last night Sri Maharshi quietly slipped out of the dispensary to his tiny bedroom, where he spent the night. Today, instead of going to the *darshan* hall, as before, he ordered his sofa to be placed outside this small room in the passage and gave *darshan* from 9 to 10 a.m. and 5 to 6 p.m., without the usual Veda *parayanam*. In the evening the attendance was heavy, as devotees began to collect for Maharshi's birthday, which this year falls on the 5th. All the wide verandahs and spaces facing the Maharshi were packed, which made meditation there very difficult. The squeeze was such that the overflow of lady-devotees had to seek sitting accommodation down below, in the coconut grove, from where they could see Sri Bhagavan.

The Master appears weak and strained from moving up and down the sofa. Three attendants have to support him from the breeches, so that the left hand may not move, nor be touched. Yet he struggles hard to push himself through the very narrow space between the wall and the sofa to and from the bedroom.

5th January

Today is *Jayanti* – Sri Maharshi's 70th birthday. It has been rumoured that the Sarvadhikari is going to request him to go to the big hall for the celebration and *arati* on account of the great gathering of devotees. We were worried over it, fearing lest the crossing of the forbidding threshold should prove the last straw. But to our relief we found him this morning giving *darshan* in the usual passage. He sat from 9 to 10-30, when *arati* was brought out. For the first time in the history of the Ashram, Maharshi today did not have his *Jayanti* meal along with the devotees. His stiff knees did not permit him to squat

on the floor. Secondly he was on special diet, free from chillies, tamarind, garlic, onions, etc., as ordered by the homeopath. In the afternoon he gave *darshan* from 3 to 6 o'clock, i.e., two hours longer than usual, in order not to disappoint *sadhakas*, who had come from long distances.

8th January

Sri Maharshi's health is reported to be well enough to justify an increase by half an hour in the *darshan* time to one and a half hours twice a day, from tomorrow. He was rather ruffled this afternoon by a small incident, when he found himself left alone in the bathroom with none by his side to help him. He came out and rebuked the attendants for showing diligent attention to his person in the presence of others, whereas in private they abandoned him, and asked them not to crowd around him any more for this show. Old disciples knew that he did not mean to deny the complete devotion and ungrudging service they all gave to his beloved person, but simply intended to keep them on their toes.

20th January, 1950

The Veda *parayanam* which stopped on the 19th December started again today, not near the Maharshi as before, but inside the temple, the sound of which reached us on the east verandah where we faced the Maharshi.

8th February

Homeopathic treatment is continuing with Thuja in the 30th potency, followed by Nux Vomica for costiveness. Since the 6th, a single dose of Thuja 1000th was given to Maharshi, a third dose every morning, the last of which today. Since yesterday he has been feeling some discomfort near, as well as

some thickening of the flesh around, the wound, which frightened the authorities, but which the homeopath declared to be an aggravation from the high power dose, which would disappear within a week. The Sarvadhikari asked the English disciple, who had led the clamourers for homeopathy, to be present henceforward at the dressing every morning.

12th February

General Bhatia, Surgeon-General of Madras State, who came on inspection duty to Tiruvannamalai, called at the Ashram at about 10 a.m. at the request of a friend and saw the wound. He did not like the swelling and recommended penicillin, which he thought would dissipate it, if it were an inflammatory process. "At any rate," he remarked, "we should know what it is." Dr. Shankar Rao, the attendant physician, appraised the homeopath in charge of the case of the General's advice, but the latter turned it down on the ground that it might be an aggravation from his dose of Thuja 1000, which must not be interfered with.

14th February

A new growth is now appreciably perceptible just below the spot operated on, on the 19th December, which the homeopath persists in diagnosing as a swelling due to his strong dose, which "will soon subside leading to complete cure". The homeopath will leave on the 16th to the hills and will keep a homeopath friend to look after the case.

15th February

Dr. Raghavachari came before noon, closely examined the new swelling and declared it to be the sarcoma again.

The pain has greatly increased, so much so that the slightest touch of the hand causes Maharshi to wince. A conference of the doctors, the Sarvadhikari, and some devotees was called in which the attention of T.S.I. was drawn to the surgeon's verdict. Whilst not denying the reappearance, T.S.I. reiterated his faith in a possible cure if his homeopathy were allowed to continue. A second conference was held in the evening which also ended inconclusively.

17th February

Before T.S.I. left yesterday, Mr. R. Iyer, the succeeding homeopath, started his treatment with one dose of Silicia 30, to be repeated once a day.

25th February, 1950

Yesterday homeopathy was declared a failure and altogether stopped. The *Moos* (the Malabari Vaidya: *doctor of unani medicine*), who had been called and had arrived on the 21st, immediately took charge and started with an external application followed by a laxative. Dr. Shankar Rao remained the attending physician. He proved extremely valuable in co-operating with any system of medicine and with any doctor appointed by the Ashram authorities. He does his work with genuine humility, utter devotion, and calmness.

27th February

The tumour started bleeding, which the *Moos* ascribed to his medicines "driving out all the morbid matter from Bhagavan's system," to use his own words.

6th March

Sri Bhagavan's health is visibly deteriorating.

14th March

The tumour has rapidly increased in size and the pain in severity. Although the *Moos* continues to treat, he has admitted his failure to cure, or even to alleviate the pain. Dr. Shankar Rao has given an anodyne to relieve the pain. The blood-test taken two days ago showed only 58% of haemoglobins, indicating severe anaemia. But with all this Sri Bhagavan's face remains bright, calm and serene. Not a sigh, not a grimace of suffering not a shadow of fear or restlessness mars the repose of his countenance or the lustre of his eyes. He remains in his usual splendour, poise and grace. Even the peace which has all along radiated from him, continues to be powerfully felt. A newcomer looking at him would not suspect that such a virulent disease was inside that graceful body, sapping its life away by the minute.

17th March

On the 15th, Dr. Raghavachari and two other doctors came, saw the condition of Maharshi and gave a written report, which the Ashram authorities quickly locked up in the iron safe, which led to the presumption that it contained a bad prognosis. Since some days reports of Sri Maharshi's deteriorating health have been appearing in the Madras Press, especially in the English daily, *The Hindu*.

Maharshi's temperature for some days has been standing at about 100 (his normal is around 97.5). His systole today is 98, pulse high, heart has rapid action, perhaps hypertrophied, with ankle swelling and the growth continues to expand.

20th March

The Tamil radio and Press broadcasts of Maharshi's illness in Madras and Bombay caused yesterday a large influx of anxious visitors and devotees from all over the South,

amounting to about a thousand. Among them was Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, the former Dewan of Travancore, who carried for Sri Bhagavan a garland of beautiful roses of a man's size.

A Bengali devotee brought the good news from his "competent" astrologer that Sri Maharshi "would live at least till July 1953, if not for another twelve years", as his disease was "not a malignant tumour, but rheumatic inflammation", (sic!), for which he recommended a certain *basmah* (*siddha* medicine), which the devotee himself could secure in its "absolute purity" from his own great *Kaviraj* (a *siddha* doctor: specialist in *Ayurveda*) in Calcutta. But the *Moos*, still in charge of the case, refused to administer it, suggesting patience for another four days, at the end of which the *Kaviraj* might be called to administer it himself, if Maharshi's health would not have improved by then. Some disciples supported one side, some the other, with the result that the *basmah* was not given.

In the meantime the case has become almost unmanageable and the weakness excessive. Yesterday morning while going to the bathroom, Maharshi tottered and fell. His attendants, having been unaware of his increased debility, continued to behave as before and failed to support him when he walked. Luckily it was a mild fall and did not have adverse after-effects.

24th March, 1950

Yesterday evening suddenly Maharshi's temperature rose to 101.6, his pulse likewise rose, the heart's murmur was heard all over the chest, and the smell from the wound worsened. While returning from the bathroom at 6-15 p.m. he felt faint and crashed on his couch. Dr. S. Rao and the *Moos*, who were quickly called, gave him some coconut water and absolute rest. After fifteen minutes he recovered.

26th March

After *darshan* hour last evening there was much activity outside the hall. Mrs. T., Mrs. M., Mr. B., Mr. S., Mr. Balaram Reddy and one or two others went into consultation, once jointly and once in small groups and rushed here and there, and to and fro for about forty minutes. I knew there was something brewing. Later I learnt that they had sought permission to call in the *Kaviraj* and that the permission had been granted. Immediately a telegram was sent to him to Calcutta to start for this place without delay. The *Moos's* treatment has stopped.

27th March

Maharshi is suffering from persistent nausea and cannot retain even water. There is no appetite, and urination is very scanty. The tumour is now as big as a coconut.

29th March

The *Kaviraj*, who arrived at 10 a.m. today gave the Maharshi his first dose diluted in milk.

Sri Maharshi's weakness has become so pronounced that since last evening he stopped sitting out for *darshan*. Devotees are now twice a day made to pass his door and bow to him in queues formed in the garden below the passage near where his sofa used to be placed during *darshan* hours.

Systole fell to 88 and diastole to 60. The *Kaviraj* gave orally two or three more doses during the day.

5th April

Yesterday Monsieur Cartier-Brassen, the expert French photographer, took a photograph of Sri Bhagavan, which may prove to be the last one of him.*

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* It *did* prove to be the last.

Maharshi's health has remained more or less stationary since about a week. His nausea and scanty urination have not been persistent, yet there has been no improvement in his general condition, which continues to prevent his coming out for *darshan*.

Yesterday morning His Excellency the Governor of Madras, the Maharaja of Bhavanagar, and his wife had Sri Bhagavan's *darshan* in the small room, then worshipped in the Ashram's temple, enquired after the two white peacocks they had presented some weeks back and left.

6 p.m. Till now Sri Maharshi has not passed urine at all for 24 hours. The tumour is spreading with masses of cauliflower-like heads. The *Kaviraj* left yesterday for Calcutta after keeping directions and medicines in the hands of the local *Kaviraj*, Dr. Parashurama Iyer.

6th April, 1950

Symptoms of definite toxaemia have set in in Maharshi's body. For the whole day his urinary secretion did not exceed one ounce. The rate of his red blood corpuscles has fallen to a new low and his intake of nourishment is not worth mentioning. Dr. Parashurama Iyer came to see me and told me that he had asked the Sarvadhikari to call in the *Kaviraj's* assistant from Calcutta, "for I do not agree with the medicines left with me by him. The *tambara* (copper) *basma* which I am asked to give is, I feel, far too strong in the present state of Bhagavan's health. I have given a very small portion of it and fear to give more, as directed. I do not want to bear the consequences of such strong medicines, particularly as they are not prescribed and prepared by myself. The case is hopeless." So they wired to the *Kaviraj* to send a competent man.

Sri Maharshi is slightly better. He is less drowsy today and is voiding urine from time to time. He has ordered his attendants to offer him nothing for which he does not ask, saying: “If I want water, I’ll ask for it: you are not to remind me.” He is given six times a day the *Kaviraj’s* medicines in liquid form, which he finds irksome to take. “What! again medicine!” he would exclaim when given again, and whatever liquid medicine he ingests he deducts from the quantity of the liquid nourishment, liquid being the only form of food he now consumes: not that he wants deliberately to sabotage the doctors’ treatment, but it is simply impossible for him to accommodate in his stomach more than he can conveniently manage. And if he is pressed by an unwise person to take a little more, he goes on *satyagraha* against all food and medicine and no man born of a woman can prevail upon him to remove the ban till it pleases him to do so, when he feels that the punishment he has inflicted by his resistance is commensurate to the pressure exercised on him. Doctors gently argue with him that scanty urination can be relieved only by an increased intake of fruit juice and water. “And if I can’t take?” he would answer, and there the matter must end. He leaves his body to manage its health or diseases as best it can, without the slightest effort of co-operation on his part. His mind is ever sunk in bliss. It is true that his body is suffering, but that is no reason why he should disturb his mind to oblige it. If it dies, well and good; if it remains, so much the worse for it: it is the business of Him who made it to keep or take it away and do all the worrying – it is none of his own business to interfere and inconvenience himself on its behalf.

The systole fell to 78 and the diastole to 50.

8th April

Last night Maharshi felt too weak to walk to the bathroom. A commode was brought in for him and he is using it. For three nights he has been suffering from severe headache, which the attendants relieve by pressing hard the head. It is reported to be due to the abnormally low blood pressure.

9th April, 1950

Anxiety and grief are stamped on every face after the evening *darshan*. Maharshi is very listless, almost lifeless, and troubled by headache, hiccup and extreme exhaustion. The *Kaviraj's* son arrived today. He looked very young, raw and thoroughly incompetent to deal with a serious case like this. At 7 p.m. he gave medicine to Sri Maharshi, but at 8-30 Dr. Shankar Rao reported severe headache, pulse rate 100, systole 76. A conference was held between the doctors, the new *Kaviraj*, Sri Omandurar (Chief Minister of Madras), a Bank Manager devotee and one or two others. I hear the following conversation:

Omandurar: Yes, do something but give no internal medicine. I do not know. I am not a medical man, but give no internal medicine.

Bank Manager: Let the *Kaviraj* go on with his preparation . . . and we'll see.

Dr. S. Rao (appearing worried): Yes, all right, let the *Kaviraj* prepare the external application.

Kaviraj: It will take one hour to prepare, but if you have anything to give in the meantime you may give it.....

Bank Manager: Yes, while he prepares it, if you, Dr., have anything to give, do give it.

Dr. S. Rao (thinking hard): No, let him prepare the external application (he walks away).

Devotees have the premonition that tonight is a night of extreme crisis for Sri Bhagavan. One by one they came – men and women – about seventy of them – and squatted on the east verandah of the hall in pin-drop silence and in pitch darkness, listening to Maharshi's hiccup and whispering to the attendants. At about 10-30 p.m. the Sarvadhikari, coming out of his office and, seeing the shadowy congregation, suspected the presence of lady-devotees as well. He raised his voice in their direction and told them: "Now rise, all of you, and go home, please." After some hesitation all rose and quietly dispersed.

10th April

At a conference held at 3-30 this morning it was decided to give up the *Kaviraj* and revert to Allopathy. Telephone calls went to devotee-doctors in Madras to come immediately with heart specialists.

Sri Maharshi is so weak today that he is unable to make even three steps to the commode in the room, nor use the bedpan. He tells the attendants: "I do not want to eat or drink, so that I may not need to use the commode. If I take only a little nourishment, it will dry up inside and I'll not need to rise every now and then. Besides, if I take more than two ounces, I feel as if I have taken a big meal. No, I can't use a bedpan." His awareness is absolutely undimmed.

Darshan was not permitted this morning and when the Maharshi noticed it at 9 o'clock, he enquired into the reason why the curtains were not rolled up to permit people to see him, but did not press the matter further. I later learnt that he had taken the authorities to task for having disappointed devotees from having *darshan*, with the result that in the evening

it was allowed at the usual hour – 5 to 6 – for the one thousand devotees, at least, who had gathered for it. Many disciples have been here, away from their homes for many weeks, knowing it to be their last chance of being in the company of their beloved Master. The darshan queues, one for women and one for men, have to be controlled by dozens of volunteers from the Ashram, who keep devotees almost on the run to give chance to all to have a glimpse of the Maharshi and make a quick bow to him within the prescribed time. I counted this evening 17 to 20 persons passing his door per minute. This *darshan* is no doubt a very great strain on the Maharshi, who, in his infinite compassion, keeps his face constantly turned towards the devotees the whole time the *darshan* lasts. His couch has east-west position and the door through which he looks at the devotees faces south, so that for one full hour he keeps his head turned in that direction and strains his neck. In his present state of health the strain on him must be great; yet he refuses to stop the *darshan*, or even reduce it to once a day.

His nourishment consisted today of a little fruit juice, tomato juice and some coconut water with glucose.

12th April, 1950

10 30 a.m. It looks as if we are on the eve of Doomsday, the eve of a day on which we are destined to be deprived of everything we hold worth living for: our refuge, our hopes, our greatest treasure – the precious life of the Master.

Today he is stretched full length on the sofa, with hollow eyes, sunken cheeks, pale, waxy skin and drained of vitality. Three attendants are massaging hard his legs. The upper half of the body is exceedingly sensitive and cannot be touched without causing him severe pain. During the half-hour running *darshan* at 9 a.m. he could only at times turn his face to the

devotees, but mostly he is listless. Doctors stopped testing and examining him and strictly forbade all access to his room. Everybody gave up hopes except the astrological fans who pinned their faith to charlatans' maps, diagrams and prophecies. The two top men in authority continue to wrangle with the doctors that Maharshi is curable provided the young *Kaviraj*, who is still kept here, is allowed to treat him – an argument which the doctors justly treat with contempt. Still these two headstrong men would have over-ridden the doctors' advice and continued to harass Maharshi's unwilling throat with useless drugs, but for the overwhelming opposition which rose from very influential quarters against their stupidity.

Women are weeping, men are dejected and brood in silence, for all feel this to be the last day. Maharshi is still conscious and at times speaks. But till the last he asks for nothing, expresses no opinion on what should or should not be done for him, complains of no pain, except when lifted or touched in a painful spot – then and then only, as if to give a piece of information, he remarks: "There is not a spot which is not painful to the touch." Then the attendants take the hint and use greater care in handling him, especially today when the pain is so severe.

As a rule the Maharshi, however ill he may be, never lies down when he gives *darshan*. On each of the two big operation days, last August and December, he reclined on cushions, but today out of excessive weakness he lay fully stretched.

At 8 p.m., Maharshi's temperature was 96, pulse rapid and thready, blood pressure 68/36, head heavy and aching, violent pain in the legs and thighs. When he was offered *kanji* (porridge) in the morning, he remarked: "Why all this *kanji*? Give me butter-milk," which they did, morning and evening. He has taken also water off and on. Since some days he has

been saying that dieting has spoilt his appetite and upset his digestion. It all started with the homeopath, who thoughtlessly restricted this, that and the other item of diet to which he had been accustomed, and substituted it by his own – a vain fad. Next came the *Moos*, who, not only made more restrictions, but also gave medicines which are far from being conducive to appetite. Then followed the *Kaviraj* with still narrower diet and more potent medicines, frequently repeated. Sri Bhagavan today remarked: "From the beginning I said there was no need for all this, but who listens to me? Now my stomach is so upset that it cannot retain anything; nor have I appetite for any food; my taste is spoilt, my tongue has lost its sensitiveness, and I am forced to eat and drink; how can I do it?"

This morning a relative of his went in to see him. With all his ailments Sri Bhagavan remembered that it was his (the relative's) father's death anniversary, for which he asked the visitor: "Have you performed the *shraddha* ceremony today? Have so and so (naming the persons) attended it. . . ?" which shows that he was not only clear in his mind, but also retained a very clear memory. When after dinner one of the attendants came in to take his turn Bhagavan asked him: "Have you had your dinner?" ...

Evening *darshan* was also an half-an-hour run at the rate of about 30 persons to the minute. It was again followed by the same dejection and anxiety as in the morning. Dr. Shankar Rao later told me: "There is no fear for tonight, for Bhagavan's body is not behaving in the way other bodies behave in similar circumstances. When we give it up, it continues to live; no man with blood pressure below 80/50 has the chance of living long and Sri Bhagavan's body has been below 80 for more than ten days and today it is 68/36 – abnormal! So we can't say."

At 10-15 p.m. the headache was extremely severe. The attendants pressed and vigorously massaged the head and the legs.

13th April, 1950

Tamil New Year – 2 p.m. Morning observations: Maharshi's diastole climbed up to 46, but the systole remained stationary at 68, pulse 94, temperature 98.4 (normal! what an irony!), breathing 22 per minute.

Morning *darshan* ran for half an hour, during which Maharshi's eyes remained closed and when he occasionally opened them, they looked in front rather than to the left where the devotees were filing past him. His diet consists now of only butter-milk.

10 p.m. Owing to the very heavy attendance of visitors from all over the South, nearly 1500, the evening *darshan* had to be lengthened to 45 minutes.

Many devotees remained till late in the evening to receive the final medical oral report for the day. At 9-30 Dr. Krishnamurti, a local physician and a great devotee, walked up to me and said: "My own impression is that there is no immediate danger. Bhagavan has just told the attendants to go to sleep as he himself was going to do. His breathing is not laboured, and there is no gasping in evidence."

Friday, 14th April

Maharshi is in a very precarious condition. The whole morning has been spent by devotees in hushed gloom and with bated breath. After evening *darshan*, the unanimous verdict is that it is positively the last. The Master is now propped on large pillows, almost in a sitting posture, the head resting backward with open mouth, and two attendants briskly fanning him, to enable him to breathe freely – the

battle for air, has thus started. At 7 p.m. oxygen is administered to him for about five minutes, but seeing it gave him no relief, he feebly asked that it should be stopped.

The situation was tense: about five-hundred devotees were outside in sad expectation of the solemn last moment. Blood relations, Ashram workers, a few old disciples, and some new aspirants went in by turn to have a last sight of him. When the end was known to be approaching, the whole congregation with one voice started chanting the Tamil hymns he had many years ago composed in praise of Lord Arunachala: "Arunachala Shiva, Arunachala Shiva, Arunachala!" till it came about 8-47. Many devotees grief-stricken and beating their breasts, lost control of their feeling and rushed *en masse* to the small room where the sacred body lay, but Police officers immediately cordoned off the area till it was brought out and placed in the centre of the big *darshan* hall in *yoga asana* for all the people to pay their last respect to it. The news spread like wildfire to the town and the neighbouring villages and drew huge crowds. By 9-15, the crowd grew so thick, that it became necessary to give chance to all to pay their homage and pass the body in an orderly manner. A queue was thus formed – seven to ten broad – at a quick-march pace. It is still (11-55 p.m.) continuing unabatingly.

Around the sofa sat dozens of disciples, some chanting Maharshi's verses and other devotional hymns, but the others remained in silent contemplation. Sandal-wood paste and jasmin flowers now cover the body and incense burns by its side.

At about 9 p.m., Monsieur Cartier-Brassen, the French photographer, who has been here for about a fortnight with his wife, related an experience of his to me. "It is a most astonishing experience," he said. "I was in the open space in

front of my house, when my friends drew my attention to the sky, where I saw a vividly-luminous shooting star with a luminous tail, unlike any shooting star I had before seen, coming from the South, moving slowly across the sky and, reaching the top of Arunachala, disappeared behind it. Because of its singularity we all guessed its import and immediately looked at our watches – it was 8-47 – and then raced to the Ashram only to find that our premonition had been only too sadly true: the Master had passed into *Mahanirvana* at that very minute." Several other devotees in the Ashram and in the town later told me that they too had seen the tell-tale meteor.

15th April, 1950

Many devotees kept vigil the whole of last night by the side of the sacred body; some snatched a few hours rest and returned early morning. The singing and chanting of Vedas continued throughout, as did the queue of worshippers till 11-30 a.m. today when the body was taken out to the South verandah for *puja* and *abhishekam*. Sri Niranjanananda Swami, the Sarvadhikari, assisted by his son Sri T. N. Venkataraman, poured over the sacred head dozens of pots of milk, curds, butter-milk, orange juice, mashed bananas and jackfruits, coconut water, etc., followed by many bottles of rose-water, attar, perfumes of all kinds and sweet smelling oils. Then enormous garlands of fresh roses and jasmins were placed round the neck and strewn all over the body.

The *samadhi* pit was dug 10½ x 10½ feet and seven feet deep. In its centre the masons isolated a small area of 4½ x 4½ feet and surrounded it by a wall built of granite stones, lime and cement. The remaining portion they filled with many cartloads of sand said to have been brought from the sacred Ganges and Narbada valleys.

At 6-30 p.m., the body, which by then had received the homage of not less than about 40,000 persons was carried in a decorated palanquin reserved for the Deity of the temple to the *samadhi*. Here it was placed in the same *yoga-asana* into a bag made of the finest khaddar, which was then filled with pure camphor and lowered into the small area reserved for it. Then the pit was filled to the brim with camphor, salt, and sacred ashes to protect the body from worms and rapid disintegration, and closed with masonry work. The crowd was so intense that twenty policemen were hardly sufficient to control it.

Mr. Kaikobad, a Parsi devotee of the Maharshi, last night happened to be on the terrace of his house in Madras, when he saw the meteor, to which Monsieur Cartier-Brassen and others referred last night and intuitively associated it with the *Mahanirvana* of the Master and, without waiting for the morning, he immediately hired a taxi and came at top speed.

Miss H. P. Petit, who was sitting on the balcony of her house in Bombay, about a thousand miles away, also saw the shooting star at that fateful minute, at once guessed its meaning and wrote to a friend of hers in Benares that the Maharshi had passed away.

16th April, 1950

All the English and Tamil papers which arrived this morning from Madras gave wide publicity in banner headlines to the passing of the Maharshi. They also referred to the meteor which had been seen in the sky all over the State of Madras, hundreds of thousands of square miles, at 8-47 on the night of April 14, by a large number of people in different places and reported to the Press. These eye-witnesses had been

struck by its peculiar look and behaviour, which led them to ascribe the strange phenomenon to the passing of a great spiritual soul. Such a mass of evidence speaks for itself, if evidence need be.

THE END

Residual Reminiscences of Ramana

PREFACE

These few pages are the remnant of the memories which have been preserved by the author from his contact with his divine Guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi, who passed into *Mahanirvana* a little more than twenty-five years ago. The perspicacious reader will not wonder at their fewness but rather at their largeness, taking into consideration the author's age of 80, the long period that has elapsed between the time they were imprinted on his mind and the time (now) he was asked to write them down.

The major part of the matter included herein is a genuine memory-work and the small portion that bears dates and names is extracted from the author's notebooks which are sprawled over not less than twenty-four in number, apart from the special two which served as the source of his first book, *Guru Ramana*.

August 1975
Sri Ramanasramam
Tiruvannamalai

S. S. COHEN

Residual Reminiscences of Ramana

On the second or third day of my arrival at Sri Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai, in February 1936, I visited the only other foreigner-resident in this place. Still standing on the threshold of his temporary lodging, I spoke loudly to the big, hulking gentleman seated at the table writing. "Good morning, Mr. Brunton," I said, "I bring you greetings from Mr. A. Bose." His answer came booming that he was not Mr. Brunton but Major Chadwick and that nevertheless I could come in, pointing to a chair, and himself turning round in his chair to face me. I entered and addressing him straightaway, said that I had come for about a week to study the Maharshi's teaching and if I find it skull-racking like the Western philosophy which is all theory and not an ounce of experience, back I go. Major Chadwick answered: "The Maharshi is entirely different: if he is not all experience and practice, he is nothing. Brunton, I hear, is expected in a day or two."

After a few days I sat in the hall almost alone, after the Maharshi returned from breakfast. He saw a leather-bound book by my side and asked me: "What book is that?" taking it to be, I guessed, a scriptural manual. I answered that it was a notebook. He chuckled and said to the interpreter: "*Vellai Karan* (the white man) does not move about without a notebook." This opening encouraged me to broach the subject of sex. I said: "Last night Mr. Brunton and myself had a heated discussion on the question of sex and marriage, but I did not agree with the loose way the West is dealing with it, especially as it affects the spiritual life. What does the Maharshi think about it?" The Maharshi kept silent for a moment and remarked: "As far as this *sadhana* is

concerned *Bramacharya* means dwelling in Brahman, the absolute Reality", leaving me to take it as I willed. Needless to say, that from the start I spent just about all my time in the hall and probed into any book that came my way on the Maharshi's teaching. The more I read of him and his teachings the clearer I became in my mind about him. About three months passed and I continued to hold tight to the hall whenever Bhagavan was present, so much so that the chanting of the *Veda Parayanam* became an intolerable sound to my ears. One day I nudged Brunton by my side and whispered to him that the Veda reading was not adding to, but that it was impeding my spiritual progress, if there was any such thing as progress at all. He signalled to me to tell Bhagavan about it. When I later told Bhagavan he simply kept silent as if he had not heard. But when the next day I went early to the hall, as usual, I found him ready for me, for as soon as I sat down, he turned to the interpreter, who was always there at that time for meditation and told him to ask me why I did not like the *Veda Parayanam*. I answered, that it was not being chanted melodiously, which causes more dryness in the heart than *bhakti*, that the Veda boys did not seem to know what they were reciting. Bhagavan laughed and said that it was because I was not used to it: "You see how the hall fills at that time in the evening, proving that the people liked it. If you get used to it and understand its purpose you will also like it".

He hardly finished when an Andhra woman entered in a huff, prostrated before Bhagavan and started shouting: "Give me my husband. You took him from me and you must return him to me. I am starving and he is without a job. The school in which he works does not want him anymore. He comes here without taking leave. The first and the second escapades of his were condoned, but they

cannot allow him unrestrained freedom forever. Please make him live the normal life of a husband and a responsible man." The man concerned was seen huddled near the north window and laughing in a subdued tone. Bhagavan told the woman that he had nothing to do with her husband's behaviour. "This hall is open day and night, permitting anyone to enter or quit. There is your husband, let him say if I have at any time asked him to come or go." The man all of a sudden began to shout: "Then who made me come but you? After Sri Aurobindo's *darshan* I took the train to go to Andhra, but when I reached Villupuram my feet refused to enter the Andhra train and took the train to this place. Who did it but Bhagavan? I am perfectly willing to return home if Bhagavan releases me." Bhagavan was almost struck dumb at the cheek of this man. In all truth Bhagavan consciously had nothing to do with it and told the man that it was his own imagination which had fancied this story – that it was delusion, not truth, and that if he returned home with his wife he was most welcome. The man answered he would return after two or three days, not now. "Let her go and I will follow." The woman said she would return and shot out of the hall to have a small chat with her husband outside. She apparently left Tiruvannamalai that very day, for we never saw her again on that day or the next, although we saw him many times throughout the remaining 13 or 14 years of Bhagavan's life.

That night in our stroll after dinner, Brunton advised me not to be in haste to judge the Maharshi's influence and teaching, and that the answer the Maharshi had given me in the morning about the *Veda Parayanam* clearly indicated that I should wait. So I waited.

The dust of time gathered round me and I found myself settled down to the quiet life of the Ashram in my newly-built mud hut in Palakottu. Four, five, six months have elapsed since my arrival. I waited, but began to notice a new turn in the working of my mind, a thing which I had not felt before, a peculiar, slow but extremely subtle movement was taking place within my consciousness and I wondered what it could be, and whether the Maharshi was aware of it as well. Seeing me from close quarters, always near the foot of his couch, I thought, was easier for him to guess than if I were at greater distance. Obviously, the notion that the guru always watched his disciples, continued lurking in my head. But in fact, as I discovered later, Bhagavan was doing nothing of the kind. He was Supreme Detachment incarnate. If he knew anything of it, he showed not the least sign of it. And I took several years of close proximity and experience to discover the reason of it. Now it appears a heresy to me to accuse Bhagavan of such an act.

The strict aloofness which appeared to me at first as sheer callousness on the part of the Maharshi, standing against the traditional concern said to be shown by the gurus to promote the spiritual advancement of their disciples, turned out across the years to be more potent in its action to purify, reform, guide and mature the disciples' consciousness than the guru's conscious interference. Without this detachment the guru is bound to grow partial and discriminative, which is fatal to the intention of help, for it ends by dissipating the special concentrated power inherent for the purpose in him.

Renunciation or surrender is the cornerstone of *sadhana*, leading directly to *Mukti* itself, and with the Maharshi it was

the most complete. No doubt there have always been a number of deluded devotees who tried to ingratiate themselves with him in this Ashram, not less than in other Ashrams, but Bhagavan never deviated from the neutrality in his spiritual attitude towards them, in their own interest and benefit. Answering spiritual questions he always did, but he never attempted consciously to give Self-Realization to any in all the fourteen years of my contact with him, either by touch, mental projection or any other means. Unconscious *siddhis*, the divine powers which are inherent in the Self, follow the *Jnani-Guru* like his shadow, and work out the miraculous transformation in the consciousness of the disciples at the right time, without a call for them by the *Jnani* himself. I do not speak of the conscious *siddhis* which are claimed by the "clairvoyant", "clairaudient", "occultist", "initiate" and their fraternity, for I know nothing about them. The unconscious *siddhis* are all the divine powers which adhere to the Self-Realized man who has surrendered himself completely to God or absolute Reality, and which act of their own accord without an appeal from the *Jnani* himself. The *Jnani* had already divested himself of the personal will and had merged it into that of the Divine, which alone henceforth acts until the end of the lifetime of the *Jnani's* body.

To return to the state of my mind after the passage of some five or six months, observing the changes in it; it was like waking from a dream. Hectic business and the materialistic dispositions of the vast majority of men towards one another, and towards their own selves, appeared to me like a confused dream, wherein no reason nor balanced judgements operated. I began to notice in the months that followed, an entirely new trend in the process of my thinking,

namely, an occasional "peeling off", so to say, of the clouds that had always weighed heavily on my mind and heart. In other words life was becoming less sinister and more bright than it was before. I "saw light", as they say, which could only be the result of my *sadhana*. It was the direction, I reasoned, into which the Maharshi's teaching and presence were leading me. I saw glimpses of the bliss which was said to be the very nature of the Self, which I thought I was approaching for certain. My joy can be imagined at this discovery. The very sensitiveness to the new state was bliss abounding, a grace which Bhagavan so freely distributed all around, especially to those who had rendered themselves more responsive to it by their practice, and that too without doing it intentionally.

My attitude towards staying or departing was now settled. I stayed and made the aim of my future life clear to myself without planning it and in spite of myself, so to say. The die is cast, as they say, and cannot be uncast. I am not going to be a part of a world again, which wallows in the mucky madness, pursuing the glittering pleasures of life, even by people who appear to be sane and respectably situated.

Is this a sign of the falling ego, which is promised to serious seekers as a reward for their strenuous efforts? It seemed to me more than likely, but there was Bhagavan to corroborate or refute the validity of our experience.

One day I got my opportunity and told him that I always understood that Realisation was sudden. He answered that it must not be forgotten that before the suddenness, maturing is required, which is a slow process, like the ripening of an apple on a tree. Thus it became plain to me that it was this process that I had simply become aware of. That was all.

Looking at Bhagavan once I heard someone telling him: "Mrs. Besant translates *Nirvana* as 'blown out' or 'blown off'. She does not seem to mean what the Buddha meant by the word. How does Bhagavan translate it?" Bhagavan answered: "It is not the literal translation that counts. What counts is the meaning of it. Mrs. Besant probably means *Shunya* which is correct. Emptiness is the pure '*nirvanic*' state of the Self or *Turiya*, where no object is observed. There is only the subject aware of nothing but himself as the Pure Consciousness – *Chit*. But even the 'blown out' carries this implication of the emptiness of the state, something like deep sleep in the waking state (*sushupti* in *jagrat*). There can be no other meaning to *Nirvana*." But the intrepid questioner persisted in attributing to the Buddha a meaning other than 'blown off'. He said: "I do not believe that Mrs. Besant had an inkling of the meaning of *Turiya* being *Shunya*, or that *Shunya* and Consciousness (*Chit*) mean the same. Hinayana Buddhism takes Consciousness as always objective and stops at a certain degree of meditation, as a thing to be transcended". Bhagavan kept silent.

Before the Second World War a European disciple of Bhagavan brought with him a friend from Germany, whose knowledge of Bhagavan's teaching may be definitely depicted as NIL. He and I were walking together one afternoon talking about the political conditions then prevailing in Germany. As usual the urchins living in the mantapams in Chengam Road, seeing a white face and blue eyes, stretched their hands demanding money. My companion made signs to them to go away, but they persisted, the more so as they saw him getting angry. The more they persisted the angrier he became. I told him to take no notice of them. All of a sudden he broke from me and pursued them, sometimes pelting them

with stones, which they reciprocated in kind, till I ran after him and stopped him. With a crimson face he complained that they were abusing him. I told him had he ignored them, they would have gone, as they do whenever I pass them, because they know I never give them anything. Examining his body I found it luckily safe from the stones cast at it.

We reached the hall, where I felt he was going to complain to Bhagavan, blaming the Ashram for permitting wandering tribes to live so close to it, which I did not want him to do. So, as soon as he started to speak I forestalled him, by saying that the boys on the road were taking him for a rich European and had been giving him trouble by abusing him. Bhagavan sat quiet for a second and said: "Abusing whom? They saw a white body and thought it to be very rich and so would give them money. Had he believed that they were abusing the body, not him, he would have added to their abuses and curses on his own body, and thus they would have left him in peace. You see how a senseless matter could have turned very serious out of sheer *avidya*. All this comes from the body: it is man's greatest enemy, which one should treat as it deserves. In this case ignoring the beggars would have been the most salutary choice."

Years rolled on and I continued to practise my *sadhana* at an equal and steady tempo, although physical fatigue started to imperceptibly slow it down, until it began to be serious. I was in my 50th year. The youthful zest began to lose its daily bread, endangering my progress, the progress which I had built with so much labour. But I must confess that I had not wasted my time; a uniform inner calmness was my reward, which was sufficient for my purpose then. Yet it was evidently wrong on my part to feel satisfied and slacken the pursuit of the enemy within. For

this calm may prove elusive, even ominous, because this is the stage when one is likely to slip into the false belief that one has attained *Sahaja*, *i.e.*, real Liberation, a state in which one feels that one is competent to open an Asramam of one's own and succeed. Succeed he may, especially if he has a strong will, which loudly claims to have been surrendered, but is actually very much alive, or he may dismally fail, if not from the very beginning, at least in the course of his life. If the latter happens, due to his error of assessing his attainment, he may return to his old *sadhana* and flourish; otherwise, he will have to wait for full Realisation in another life, which is sure to follow.

On another day, I heard an old lady's voice complaining to Bhagavan that the Ashram books were written in high English, making them terse and unintelligible to people who come from non English-speaking countries. The language should be made easier and the points well-developed. Bhagavan answered that it couldn't be helped because the language to be read by those who understand English must be good, grammatical and idiomatic: "Will you read a French book which is loosely, badly and non-idiomatically written? You will not touch it. The translations should be in the best language to command respect. Foreigners, by repeated reading, can make themselves well acquainted with the English used, as we witness a number of Germans, French, etc., who can now speak perfect English. In fact most foreigners who visit this Ashram appear to have been educated in English and do not complain about the difficulties of our books. Most of them say, when asked, that they had learned their English in schools. Although you are right about complete foreigners to English, but these are very few in comparison with the majority."

In common with other disciples of the Maharshi, I used to tell Bhagavan of any project I intended forming. I awaited my chance to tell him of what I was planning and one day I got it. I told him that for some weeks I had been feeling a bit jaded: "Does Bhagavan advise me to go for a change?" He answered that it was the monotony to which I had not been used which was responsible for my tiredness; I had better go for a change. I said I had friends in Bombay whom I had not seen for ten years. I could go to them. And within a week I was in Bombay. After the first flush of joy in Bombay I began to think of Ramanasramam and Bhagavan, but for nearly two and a half years I could not extricate myself and return to Tiruvannamalai, although my *sadhana* continued unabatedly and my inner calm did not desert me. It was as if I was in Ramanasramam. Yet it was not the same. The nostalgia for Bhagavan after that period grew daily and so, soon after, I returned 'home'.

Tiruvannamalai at last, after two and a half years of residence in noisy Babylon, godless Bombay, I returned home on the June 5th, 1948, at 8 a.m. The day was hot and sultry and left me completely wretched from the heat, from a sleepless journey and from tiredness. At 10 a.m. I went to the Ashram after my bath. Only one person was informed of my prospective return and that person had told Bhagavan, whom I found as if waiting for me when I appeared in the new commodious hall, known as the 'Jubilee hall' since 1946, which was the 50th year of Bhagavan's arrival at Tiruvannamalai. It had been the verandah to the north of the old hall. As I became aware of him coming from behind me, his face beaming upon spotting me, I prostrated myself, offered my fruits and sat in the first line of the people present,

looking at him. I saw a question in his eyes and understood its meaning. I promptly answered: "No, Bhagavan, I am finished with Bombay: I have come for good." I saw a smile on his face and was happy.

I sat feeding my eyes on the face and body of Bhagavan to assess the destruction wrought on them by Lord Kala (Time-God). He was then sixty-eight. His body had gone thinner, especially his legs and thighs, which were now almost emaciated compared to what they were in 1946. The flesh of his throat was more loose and hanging, yet his smiles and the twinkling of his eyes were still undimmed. Nowadays he rises from the couch with greater difficulty, and walks with a pronounced stoop and a swing born of the unsteadiness of the legs.

Two new Americans – a young farmer and a youngish lady – I found added to the Ashram's family of foreigners. From the beginning I felt they would end by being man and wife and so they did, a few years later in Varanasi on their way home. They were Mr. Rappold and Miss Ben and left India as Mr. and Mrs. Rappold. After a year, they had a baby boy whom they named 'Ramana', after Bhagavan's abbreviated original name 'Venkata Ramana'.

Long before these Americans, a 'considerable' German had arrived at the Ashram whom we call amongst ourselves 'the Baron' or Baron von Voltheim. He is a well-known, to put it mildly, hyperbolic. About five weeks before my arrival he spent one night at the Ashram, one of the fourteen he was spending in India. He arrived at 4-30 p.m. on the 23rd December, 1935 and left on the 24th at 9-30 a.m. He asked some questions in which Paul Brunton also joined, which he never did except on important cases. The ashramites had

therefore reason to believe the Baron to be 'important'. He left no marks behind him, except his questions in the 'Journal' and few details of his arrival and departure. As he did not want to sit on a chair out of respect for the Maharshi, and as he could not squat on the floor, he rolled one of his blankets to make it a few inches high and sat on it on the ground. His first question was: "There should be harmony between the Knowledge of the Self and knowledge of the world. They must develop side by side. Is it right? Does Maharshi agree?" As Bhagavan remained silent, Paul Brunton answered: "Maharshi agrees." Bhagavan uttered his usual, "Yes, yes."

Question: "Beyond this intellect and before wisdom dawns, there will be pictures of the world passing before one's Consciousness. Is it so?

Answer: Bhagavan pointed out the parallel passage in *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, signifying the pictures to be like reflections in a mirror.

Q.: There is a spiritual awakening the world over since 1930. Does Maharshi agree?

A.: The development is according to your sight.

So far the questions were reasonable, but then the Baron's partiality for occultism revealed itself.

Question: Will the Maharshi induce trance in me and give me an unspoken but understandable message?

Answer: (Bhagavan kept silent), but Paul Brunton said: "Maharshi could do so but he could not vouchsafe it."

The Baron then told Maharshi that he (the Baron) had established contact with the Maharshi on the 19th December at 5 p.m. when he was in the train which left Bombay at 2 p.m. So they were not new to one another. In the Connemara Hotel in Madras, the first thing that he saw was the headline

in the *Madras Mail* which read: "Two Europeans in Ramanashram," which he perused with interest. At this point the Maharshi went out. The Baron left the Ashram at about 9-30 a.m. the next day; but it did not prove to be the end of the Baron episode.

One morning a few months afterwards, the post brought some literature from Germany, and in it we found the description of the visit by Baron von Voltheim-Ostrau, as he was called in Germany. In the description he claimed that although the touch of the Maharshi's body was prohibited, he could not only touch but also massage his thighs, etc., to relieve his rheumatism; that the Maharshi had prophesied the arrival of the Baron at 4-30 p.m. on the 23rd December, as proved by the paper dictated by Maharshi to Paul Brunton, who wrote it down. This created a stir among the disciples who had never witnessed the performance of any occult phenomena by Bhagavan. And those who were present at the meeting and conversation between the Baron and Bhagavan, declared the massage of the legs was pure fiction.

Our astonishment was the greater when last month (August, 1975) we read in *The Theosophist* an article, written obviously by one of his admirers, resuscitating the fiction of the prophetic slip. We reproduce a portion of the article to give an idea of it:

"On his arrival in India, Voltheim-Ostrau (the Baron) was given a number of introductory letters to the most important Indian gurus. Among other papers he received was also a small pamphlet by Paul Brunton on Sri Ramana Maharshi, which Voltheim Ostrau read in the train from Bombay to Madras, and he reports that it did not impress him very much. After some travel in South India he came to

Tiruvannamalai, where to his great surprise he was received by the Maharshi with the words: 'You are the German whom I am expecting; ask Paul Brunton and the Swamis!' Thereupon the latter told him that during the morning the Maharshi had publicly announced that a German would arrive at exactly that hour. Voltheim-Ostrau then asked whether his coming had been announced; he had not known himself that he would go to Tiruvannamalai that day. The reply was negative. Voltheim-Ostrau quotes the contents of the following conversation: 'The Maharshi then asked in rather poor English: 'Since when are you in touch with me?' I looked up my diary and said: 'Since 19th December 1935 at 4-30 p.m. on the journey from Bombay to Madras, when I read Brunton's booklet about you.' Thereupon I was shown a slip of paper by Brunton and the Swamis on which was written: 'The German gentleman arriving this afternoon is in touch with the Maharshi from 19th December at 4-30 p.m.' This was, so to say, the first visiting card which the great guru gave me."

In the detailed chapter "The Greater Master", in which the visit to the Maharshi and the astounding and penetrating conversations with him are described, Voltheim-Ostrau tells of an impressive event. During a talk the Maharshi had gone into *samadhi*. Voltheim-Ostrau was still occupied with writing down what the Maharshi had previously said, when the latter suddenly looked at him: "We now looked into each other's eyes. I couldn't say for how long, for I went over into an almost bodiless and equally spaceless condition, in which even normal time lost its importance. I had a physical feeling of widening and weightlessness, as if one would consciously observe one's own falling asleep and having a dream .... This state, which developed further, was accompanied by an increasing awareness,

which is only to be described as an enlargement and an 'awakening' in an extraordinary stage of consciousness, of a rare logical clarity of thought …. I think I can best describe it as a feeling of an unimaginable state of equilibrium of my whole being, including my past, present and future, and that an infinite, impersonal love extended itself over and through me on all that had ever entered my life. I felt around me all the people and creatures with whom I had even been in touch – whether alive or dead – and I stood in an inexpressible state of peace without any problem or agitation towards them, impersonal and yet full of warmest love."

He then continues: "My eyes immersed in the golden depths of the Maharshi's eyes who dwelt in *samadhi*, something took place which I can only describe in deepest awe and in all modesty, truthfully, quite simply and shortly. The dark colour of his body slowly changed into white. This white body became brighter and brighter, as if illuminated from inside, and began to shine …. Now I saw and knew for myself why the whole of India revered this personality as a living god.

"From then onward this shining body appeared always when Voltheim-Ostrau put himself in touch with the Maharshi in meditation, even after the latter's death on 14th April, 1950. The well-known German para-psychologist Dr. Gerda Walther, in her book *Phenomenologie der Mystik* (*Phenomenology of Mysticism*) has quoted this experience of Voltheim-Ostrau together with a number of others. The Dutch philosopher and theosophist Prof. J. J. Poortman also mentioned this 'shining body experience' in connection with teachings and experience of other cultural groups, in his five volume work, *Ochema*, in which he dealt extensively with

the different ideas about subtle states of matter." Here ends the quotation from the article.

As for the Maharshi's *samadhi* during his talk with the Baron, no one, of course, can say anything, for the state of *samadhi* must have been within the mind or Consciousness of the Maharshi, and neither the Baron nor any occultist could have known its contents or that it is *samadhi* at all. His disciples are used to such claims by the variety of unperfected and immature people who come to the Ashram with all sorts of notions, all sorts of intellectual attitudes and abilities and all degrees of inflated egos. We simply ignore them. They do more harm to their own selves than to anyone else. No one can become an occultist, or a clairvoyant by merely wishing it at the top of one's voice, or writing it in one's diary. If it is anything, it is a demonstration of *avidya* (ignorance), or a psychical imbalance.

An amusing incident took place years ago in the hall in the very presence of Bhagavan.

It could be somewhere early in 1937, but the date is not of importance. The Sarvadhikari, let us say, the *de jure* Sarvadhikari was for a few days absent from his seat, and in his place ruled the temporarily *de facto* Sarvadhikari, let us call him Mr. S. I.

The 'Journal' – two ledger-like tall books – used to be always in the hall, not far from Bhagavan's couch, and the author of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* used to write, on the spot, the talks that took place in the hall on that day. Bhagavan used to show it to newcomers, and anyone who wanted to write a few lines of poetry were allowed to do so.

One morning Bhagavan wanted to have a look at it. The attendant said that Mr. S. I. had carried it away. S. I. was called and made to give the reason for his action. He said

that Bhagavan had come to him in dream and ordered him to remove the Journal from the hall and never to return it. So he obeyed orders.

Bhagavan with an amused smile answered: "Well, if you are so obedient you must go and fetch the Journal, for it was the dream Bhagavan who ordered you last night, and now the waking Bhagavan is ordering you", and immediately asked the attendant to follow S. I. and bring the Journal. On his return the attendant was without the Journal, of which immediately Bhagavan guessed the reason; but kept quiet. He knew the innate superstitions of the people – they fear the dream God more than the real, the living God, and Bhagavan does not cause fear to anyone. When one thinks of Bhagavan, joy and happiness suffuse the heart and there is no reason to fear him. But the dream Bhagavan is terrible, being the child of one's own fancy where terror can be magnified to any degree one wishes. Hence the Journal remained with S. I.

Bhagavan seems to have developed a fancy for the white peacock which devotees think to be the incarnation of the late Madhavasami, his old attendant who died about two years ago. Today (18-6-48) the famous cow Lakshmi died. Some believe that she was a disciple of Bhagavan in her previous birth. They draw this conclusion from her birth, the events of her life, her great attachment to him, etc. After finishing the history of Lakshmi, Bhagavan takes up that of the white peacock, which had been brought from such a great distance as Baroda. It was born in October 1946, three months after the death of Madhavasami (July 1946) and brought to Madras in April 1947 by the Maharani of Baroda, and to Ramanasramam by Mr. David MacIver on the same day.

Bhagavan then watched the peacock's movements: It used to go to the cupboard where books were kept and touched its glass door with its beak in a straight line from east to west, as if scanning the titles of the books. Secondly, it used to appear in the hall and quit it at the very hours when Madhava used to come and go. Thirdly, it used to sit in the very places where Madhavasami used to sit and, like him, used to visit the office, bookshop, library, etc., also at the hours he used to visit these places. Its habits used to be a copy of Madhava's. Hence the conclusion of several devotees that he was Madhava reincarnated.

25th June 1948.

8-30 a.m. I am in a mood for meditation. The hall is quiet and the devotees present are very few. The morning is fresh and Bhagavan seems cheerful. I dip – once, twice, thrice. I look at my wristwatch; it is 9-10 a.m. Bhagavan is observing. I hear him saying something in English. It must be to me, I look at him. Yes, he is addressing me: "Grant Duff has passed away." I said, "At the age of 87?" "No, 83", he corrected. "Where, in the United States?" "Yes," he answered and fell into silence. I remarked: "I am sorry if he had to suffer before his death," to which Bhagavan answered, "I don't know". As there was no further talk I dipped again till 9-40 when I left.

23rd August 1948.

I am absorbed in meditation seated at the first post, opposite Bhagavan's couch. I hear Bhagavan saying: "He is the superintendent of the Asramam." I open my eyes. He turns to me, pointing to the white peacock and says: "He's the superintendent of the Asramam." I at once understood and answered: "He goes round the Asramam for inspection." "Yes, he is in a habit of going round and poking his nose into

everything, by making an affirmative nod with his head." At 6-15 p.m. Bhagavan was still speaking about the peacock superintending the Ashram. He adds that Harindranath Chatopadhyaya, who last night recited in the hall a poem he had composed on cow Lakshmi, is going to compose one on the peacock. Today Bhagavan's left cheek is swollen. I understand his gums are swollen.

24th August 1948.

Venkataratnam offers Bhagavan something which he puts into his mouth, and looks at me smiling: "Homeopathy," he says. I understood. "By whom?" I asked. Pointing to Mrs. Osborne, he answered: "By her." I said that homeopathy is very good. The cheek is less swollen today.

26th March 1949.

6 p.m., Mrs. D. who has been staying here for a long time, doing *sadhana*, and her nephew prostrated themselves before Bhagavan and asked his permission to go home to Kashmir. But suddenly Mrs. D. stood up and started to shout: "Why should I go? Bhagavan called me and I came to his feet. Why should I go back to this dirty world?" Then addressing her nephew: "Go: I am not coming." To Viswanathan, who barred her way back to the women's sector of the hall, "You are a mischief-maker. Leave me alone, I am not going." Louder and louder she shrieked, but her nephew held her tight and pulled her. Tucking up his sleeves he carried her bodily in his arms like a baby. She started screaming desperately: "Mr. Venkataramiah … Mr. Vishvanathan ...", etc. etc. but when the carrying continued she quietened down. Hardly ten minutes passed when lo! she reappeared walking on her own feet with her nephew by her side: obviously she

had promised him to see Bhagavan for the last time and return. She prostrated normally and remained long in that posture. Finally she got up and walked back to the car which was waiting outside. This was real departure, for she never returned – never to this day. Miss Merston was kind enough to accompany her to Madras, to help the nephew on the way. After Mrs. D. left, Bhagavan started commenting on her words: "Who is Bhagavan? Is he different from you?"

After my return from Bombay, I made up my mind to try as often as possible to meditate in the hall, to overcome the tendency to shy at noise, especially of children whose mothers, wisely or unwisely, give them the freedom of the hall. The other noise is the conversation with Bhagavan in languages I don't understand. But just now it is a question on 'Who am I?' and Self-Realization, in English; sometimes the subject is argued by the disciples themselves, but as a rule it was addressed to Bhagavan. Now both the methods are being used. Bhagavan speaks: "Whose Self is to be realized? Is there anyone who has no Self? Why magnify the Self as if it is something to be brought from outside? You are the Self, the Being, the 'You' itself. All you have to do is to understand this by ordinary common sense and arguments. This is called '*Vichara*' (enquiry as to who you are). This is the same as 'Who am I?'. You practise *Vichara* for Self-Realization. There is no mystery in it. Where then is the question of using 'Who am I?' as a *mantra* to be repeated consciously or unconsciously? You have to argue it, as you argue any other problem, say, when you forget your name, or when you forget which one of two particular men is your uncle. You are the Self, your misfortune now is you think It is your body, which is a mere corpse, like a motor car which has no engine to make it move."

Of course my whole attention goes to the words of Bhagavan. What happens to the meditation? Hence my stubborn advice to Chadwick not to meditate in the hall, but in his room, as I used to do. Anyhow, the Major had stopped meditating in the hall for some three years, because of lack of facility in the new verandah-hall, for him to remain undisturbed.

I hear someone from the centre of the hall raise his voice and say, "The whole trouble lies with the fact that the Self is not perceptible and the body is. We cannot even conceive of the Self, except that it is my Being, whereas we see the body move, talk, think, etc., etc. We learn from the Guru that all this is illusion, but we cannot deny our senses which speak the opposite." Bhagavan answered that that is why a trusted Guru is necessary. To the Guru what is said is crystal clear; hence He is in a position to teach the right way – from His experience; you do not have to believe your eyes, you have to believe Him.

A casual visitor got up from somewhere in the hall and came to the front line. He addressed Bhagavan bravely but respectfully: "I was here the other day in the hall when the Maharshi spoke about Self-Realization. I have no doubt that the Maharshi spoke from experience and is therefore right. But I cannot go against my training, which taught me that I am none other than the body, and that the greatest *pramanam* (one of the four evidences on which any valid argument is based) is the direct evidence which is the evidence of the eyes. I rolled all what you said in my mind and found that I cannot be convinced that the Self, or what you call *Chit* or Consciousness, is my Being, the ultimate Truth. The body also has consciousness, and when it dies it means my death also – I am finished, I go whereto all men go – never mind where.

“What does the Maharshi say?”

Bhagavan kept silent for a minute and said: “So long as you admit the existence of Consciousness in the body, there is the hope that one day you will want to know what it is, and you will want to know it by itself, as the greatest *pramana*, the greatest because life is far more important than the body without life. Even in the West admission has been made by philosophers that the evidence of the senses has been found to be useless. Have you read them?” The answer came from the visitor that he had, “But, you see, Sir, I am a follower of Madhavacharya and a believer in Dualism. I’ll be taken for a heretic if I go against my faith, with due respect to you, Bhagavan.” Bhagavan said, “*Parwa ille* (never mind).”

On this day (27-3-1949) the second operation on Bhagavan’s elbow was performed. It was to be the most decisive operation between surgical and non-surgical methods of treatment, and so it was vividly remembered by me. The whole of 1948 Bhagavan spent in comparatively sound health. In fact in all his life he never suffered any serious illness. Little, little ailments used to come and go as with children. But later, say in his sixties, rheumatism which he had contracted earlier in life used to plague him with its constancy at the hip and knee-joints. Some asthmatic wheezing used occasionally to issue from his chest in the cold season, but it never amounted to an attack. I think the attendants were keeping some home-made remedy for it, which he often refused to take, waving the offerer away, as if to tell him ‘don’t fuss’.

But hardly did 1948 turn into 1949 when the body began to suffer in real earnest. What happened from February 1949 till April 1950 was recorded in brief details elsewhere, in this book. Yet it must be confessed here that long before the end of

1949, most of his old devotees knew that the Master was going to physically leave them and enter into *Videhamukti*, and they had nothing to give them solace but a blind hope and the distracted prophecies of some pseudo-astrologers. Bhagavan himself did not take the matter seriously, as in the beginning he used to say that he was feeling no pain. He thought the doctor's surgical treatment was absolutely unnecessary and would not alter what was destined for the body from the day of its birth, as ordained by Providence. As the treatment grew more and more serious and painful, from time to time, he used to remind the devotees and the doctors of his first wishes to leave the tumour to itself and to do nothing. Yet he would have certainly approved of the other medical systems – non-surgical – which were harmless and in all probability would have given him some relief, though not cure – Homeopathy, Malabari, Siddha, etc., which were unavailingly used later. They all abhorred the use of the knife which scattered the symptoms and confused the physicians, especially the homeopaths, who rely on the symptoms to prescribe the remedies.

But the allopaths insisted on doing their duty and their level best for him through surgery and radium application. They won, leaving Bhagavan resigned to his fate. It was his destiny he might have thought and so the best thing for him to do was to bear it all silently.

I am not assigning responsibility or even mentioning names: it being too late in the day to do so. I am only writing my Reminiscences and have to record what I saw happening at that time. So the second operation had to follow.

On this 16th day of December, 1949, I was passing by the Ashram's office when I saw Major Chadwick entering it. Contrary to his habitual reticence, he was heard speaking

about Bhagavan's fourth operation which was fixed for the 19th. After a few preliminary words he grew heated at the news. Raising his gigantic voice he admonished the authorities: "How long are you going to cut Bhagavan? Let him go without this torture. So many times you operated, what good did it all do? Let him, let him, let him go...." gathering his vocal momentum at each 'let him'. He stunned all the people present; even the hardy Sarvadhikari was numbed into silence, until the Major left after a few minutes.

My sympathy was all with Chadwick, but nobody's advice was worth anything before that of the advisory inner Council, which was paying the allopathic piper.

I do not blame the authorities for not trying the other medical systems straightaway without any knowledge of them. In homeopathy for example, there was no real, competent and qualified physician. The one who was available was utterly incompetent, being a beginner. When the competent Mr. T. S. Iyer arrived, he did not stay long enough for what homeopathy demands – time and more time. Or was it because he had no hopes?

Who remained in the field competing were the allopaths, who were at least highly qualified medical practitioners and had half a lifetime of experience and practice. My only grudge was that some other medical systems, especially homeopathy, which becoming useless after the knife was used, should have been given an adequate chance, particularly on the 9th February, when the tumour was not bigger than a pea and the diagnosis of sarcoma had not yet been confirmed. Real homeopathy is of great power and quick acting, and who knows if it would not have won the medical race? Bhagavan also would not have objected to it, as he did the knife.

Dr. Shankar Rao admitted to me on the 21st and 23rd December, that he had given a sleeping draft to Bhagavan on the 19th, which worked for two nights, contrary to the denial of some devotees, who thought Bhagavan would not have taken it.

On the 31st December the Sarvadhikari came to know of the definite complaint of Bhagavan against the Temple hall's stone threshold, which he could not cross and recross many times a day to go to and come from the lavatory. He planned to make the lavatory inside the temple hall, so that Bhagavan may never need to leave the hall, to which Bhagavan objected. Next, the Sarvadhikari turned to the old hall and started to remove stone slabs from a part of its floor, to make the alteration, to that also Bhagavan objected.

So at about 9 p.m. on the 1st of January 1950, Bhagavan decided to make the tiny room next to the lavatory his permanent bedroom, and immediately moved to it with the help of his silent attendants from the dispensary, where he had been staying since the 19th December 1949. He never again crossed the stone threshold, which reminds one of the abandonment of Dwaraka by Krishna.

It was in the narrow passage of this small bedroom that the sofa of Bhagavan was placed in the daytime, where he gave *darshan* from the 2nd January onward to the devotees who flocked by the hundreds.

What happened to Bhagavan's body in the three-and-a-half months which followed, is public knowledge through the newspapers, through the Ashram's books and through the devotees who were having his *darshan* twice a day, until the last moment in and around Sri Ramanasramam. It was admitted on all sides that Ramanasramam did its work as

was expected of it, and could not have done it otherwise for lack of other medical mediums at the right time. Besides, as loyal disciples of Bhagavan, we have to have his faith that everything was ordained by Providence, through the action of a grim DESTINY, and be thankful to Bhagavan that his presence continues to be felt as much by old as by new devotees, even by some who were not yet born at the time he was still in the body as pure knowledge and eternal bliss.

Those who visited the Ashram after the *Mahanirvana* of Bhagavan know that the old hall has since become the most holy meditation hall of the Ashram, due to its longest association with the Master as his reception hall, bedroom, office, study and the receptacle of his sublime teaching.

And when one raises one's eyes and sees his life-size photograph installed on the very couch he had used, leaning on the very cushions which had supported his back and limbs for a good number of years, one transcends the illusion of time and space, and feels as if the physical presence is actually there too, and so, one cannot but respond in love and adoration of him who used to be called Bhagavan Ramana Arunachala, the Guru of Gurus and Supreme Consciousness and Grace personified.

OM TAT SAT